CASTE IN MODERN INDIA

edited by

SUMIT SARKAR

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CASTE IN MODERN INDIA

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CASTE IN MODERN INDIA

A Reader

VOLUME 1

Edited by
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Preface and Acknowledgements

Caste has emerged as the key discursive category in contemporary Indian social thinking, dislodging the earlier emphases on class and nation to a considerable extent, and producing scholarly explorations and polemical controversies in equal measure. The historical literature on caste in colonial times is, therefore, vast and rich, and arriving at a reasonable selection from the corpus proved exceedingly difficult. We will briefly explain the organizational scheme that we have followed in planning these two volumes.

The essays explore certain specific aspects of modern caste: how the issue of caste was variously understood in colonial times, how it was re-created under conditions of modernity, and how various castes came to relate to one another and to themselves in new ways. The volumes exclude, therefore, sociological studies of the structure of castes, as well as social anthropologies and ethnographies of lives of castes on the ground. However, the essays reproduced here have considerably absorbed the insights that such writings have produced. They also engage in debates that were first raised in these fields, thereby adding important dimensions to them. Dirks, for instance, questions Dumont's notions about purity and power, while Breman and Guha argue with the literature on *jajmani*—to mention just two instances.

For a long time, historians of modern caste have been trying to ascertain how far caste was invented, exaggerated, colluded with, and opposed by discourses of colonial social knowledge and administrative policies. In fact, the dominant strand in post-colonial historiography tended to focus almost exclusively on colonial and Western knowledge that sought an Othering of India, a stigmatization of the culture of the

colonized on account of their emphasis on caste. Administrative concerns have, on the whole, been neglected. The first set of eight essays under the theme 'Caste in Colonial Times' reflect on colonial sociology as well as on the governance of caste, but also go beyond them. Washbrook and Dirks trace aspects of the transition from precolonial to colonial times and discuss how this affected possibilities of 'low caste' mobility in the political domain, in labour markets, and in temples. Bayly queries Inden's view that caste was essentially a colonial imaginary. She points out the many strands of colonial opinion on caste, all of which were profoundly influenced by brahmanical advice. Metcalf describes the emergence of colonial ethnography from the mid nineteenth century, focusing especially on photographic techniques, even while he points out Indian discomfort with such uses. Caton diversifies the practices of colonial sociology by exploring the theme of Punjab exceptionalism since classificatory categories were significantly different in that region. While Bayly, Metcalf, and Caton point out pluralities in colonial knowledge and classificatory practices, Guha explores the *jajmani—balutedari* system in western India over 300 years. He suggests that the small scale of local markets which conditioned the system had its own specificities, making division of labour and status ascriptions more complex and flexible than suggested by Dumont and Wiser. Roger's article on caste in colonial Sri Lanka may appear out of place as it goes beyond British India and the Hindu socio-ritual context. But the essay is important precisely because it looks at castelike formations among Sinhala Buddhists, and also because in both countries colonial officials engaged in understanding and classifying social categories in similar ways. Constable's article discusses colonial policies on caste segregation in the supposedly neutral space of modern schools in western India. He finds that they were uncertainly forged under contrary pressure from missionary educators, upper-caste Hindu parents, and untouchable students.

The second set of essays, under the theme 'Caste and the Census', elaborates the specific domain of decennial censuses which have long been regarded as *the* terrain where social categories were formed. Samarendra, through arguments with Dirks and Bayly, invokes the

peculiarity of the word 'caste' in colonial usage and discusses what it does to Indian categories of *varna* and *jati* in the making of censuses. He points out, in the process, the mutability of all categories from one census to another. Conlon looks at different censuses to recover small but important shifts and variations across time and space, even as he ponders on the interlacing of the two dominant classificatory categories of religion and caste. Cohn looks at changes between precensus and census modes of enumeration, points out various levels within census activities, and identifies the precise areas where Indian voices—of ritual specialists and enumerators—enter and influence classificatory models.

Together, the first two sets of essays ponder on whether all colonial administrators, throughout British governance, were united by similar concerns and strategies, or, if their approaches varied, were multiple and shifting according to changing contingencies: how large was the space in this for Indian interventions, especially of brahman informants who advised puzzled administrators about the intricacies of caste; and how far was caste refashioned by Indian discourses and initiatives, competitions and conflicts, irrespective of the stances of the state?

With the third theme, 'Caste, Sect, Religion', we transit to the domain of Indian initiatives to explore how castes negotiated with the modern world through the prism of new religious imaginaries and sectarian practices. 'Low-caste' sectarianism is thought to lead, un-wittingly, to a congruence between caste and sect. The six essays under this theme explore somewhat similar processes in different temporal and regional contexts whose social-material specifics are carefully laid out along with the new religious worlds they articulated. Three of these 'low-caste' sects—the Satnamis of Chattisgarh, the Matuas of Eastern Bengal, and the Tiyyas and Ezhavas in Malabar—created modes of resistance to upper-caste exclusionary measures and religious injunctions which came to be resented in conditions of relative economic solvency. However, each of these religions of protest, nonetheless, re-creates the symbolic universe of upper-caste temples, shrines, and festivals, as well as their internal authority structures. The sect activities under discussion, are, therefore, neither the mimicry of upper-caste forms that

Moffat had suggested, nor are they an exact reflection of Srinivas's Sanskritization thesis. The essay on Balakdashis, by contrast, studies a 'low-caste' sect in Eastern Bengal that was explicitly conformist with brahmanical authority. Yet the mythology and hagiography of the sect are scored over with vulnerabilities as well as with new possibilities of mobility that the subaltern founder and followers of the sect lived with.

Geetha looks at the re-emergence of Buddhism from the late nineteenth century in association with organized caste protest in Madras and Bombay, examining Iyothee Thass's re-creation of a socially marked Buddhism and contrasting it with Ambedkar's strident egalitarianism and its theological form. Venkatachalapathy considers a similar situation in early-twentieth-century Madras, where political movements intermingle closely with theological debates, and complex and unstable alliances are formed among Saivites, non-Brahman politics, and anti-Hindi, anti-Vaisnav, and anti-Congress movements. He shows E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker weaving all these divergent interests together and then destabilizing them with his caste radicalism and defiance of faith.

The fourth theme, 'Caste and Forms of Labour', begins with three essays which constitute a single unit, based on an important debate about 'agrestic slavery' and landlessness in the South. S.J. Patel used census data to suggest that landless labour— among 'depressed classes' or 'low castes'—grew exponentially under British rule, dictated by new revenue settlements and market conditions. The economic vulnerability of 'low' castes, he says, was thus a British creation. Kumar differs sharply, on the grounds that since both landlessness and caste discrimination were most acute in the South, there would have been a cause and effect connection between social and economic vulnerability. She finds confirmation of her view in early colonial precensus data which shows an identical intertwining between 'low' caste and landlessness, pre-dating colonial economic policies. Krishnamurty adds to the debate indirectly by pointing out problems in Patel's use of census data, thereby strengthening Kumar's conclusions. Breman studies *halipratha,* a master—servant relationship between brahmans and untouchable labourers who are attached to their masters in a form of

debt bondage. He contributes significantly to the debate about *jajmani*, or ascribed labour forms, along caste lines in rural situations: a debate about whether such unfree labour signified security or exploitation. He shows how both are interlaced as their masters' honour and status depend on the possession of attached servants whose survival, albeit in conditions of extreme unfreedom and exploitation, depend on the subsistence provided by masters. Gooptu looks at the twentieth-century labour migration of untouchable castes to UP towns and the implications of urban existence and labour for them. She sees it as a combination of freedom from everyday direct domination and discrimination from rural caste relations along with degraded occupations and a marginalized existence. She then traces this commingling in new untouchable urban sects.

Five essays come next, to discuss 'Caste, Gender, and Identity'. Four of them look at new processes of caste identity formation among dalit communities of northern, western, and eastern India. Unlike some of the earlier essays, which trace continuities and breaks from pre-colonial conditions, Rao begins with a 1963 legal case of sexual abuse of dalit women and traces its implications back to Ambedkar's times to see how a caste-gender system emerged variously in upper- and lower-caste discourses and practices. Deshpande develops a long-term historical perspective on caste competition over the term 'Maratha' and the varied interpretations and connotations that came to accrue to this rather open category. Significantly, notions of a martial masculinity of kshatriyahood were crucial components of the claim. Gupta looks at the urbanization of dalit communities in North India, and at the images and self-images that social change wrought. While uppercaste, missionary, and colonial records depict them as docile, they also contain anxious subtexts about a potentially violent masculinity and a promiscuous female sexuality that could threaten caste boundaries. Sumit Sarkar develops a close study of a set of early-twentieth-century treatises written by a dalit group which sought to transform their caste name from Chandal to a more respectable Namashudra. As the census provided the conditions for a new status, their Namashudra identity

had to be competitively constructed in conflictual relationship with other social groups.

Ambedkar had once identified endogamy as the basis of caste, and its centrality in Hindu marriage and kinship continues in con-temporary times. Yet it is precisely this sphere of caste functioning that is most neglected in caste studies. Majumdar's discussion of the modernization of Hindu arranged marriage forms in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Bengal looks at a shift away from older custodians of caste genealogies to new caste journals which largely took over the work of aligning marriage with status.

In the sixth set of essays, on 'Caste and the Nation', Jaffrelot compares Ambedkar's analysis of caste with later sociological scholarship and points out how much Ambedkar anticipated the insights of sociologists. He then reads Ambedkar's text to identify how his scholarly analysis was intertwined with his political aim of exposing the non-viability of the entire system. Nagaraj revisits the epic combat between Gandhi and Ambedkar in the 1930s from a very different perspective, arguing that behind the more obvious contentions lay a deeper process of unacknowledged learning from each other. Pandian begins with the ways in which caste is simultaneously invoked and nullified in upper-caste memories, counterposing this to the overwhelming power of caste for dalit recollections. Contra Partha Chatterjee, he argues that even though the cultural sphere of the colonized is seen as a space of sovereignty, it is more important to problematize that excess as constituted by power relations within Indian society. Until dalits unsettle the public-private divide by articulating the repressed areas of nationalist discourses, caste will always be seen as a matter of private predilections.

This brings us to the last set of essays, on 'Caste and Resistance'. O'Hanlon traces the beginnings of modern caste protest in the practical activism and polemical writings of Jyotirao Phule. Hardiman looks at the relationship of dalits and adivasis—subaltern groups whose dividing line is not always clear—with Gandhian nationalism and its hegemonic aspirations to re-create and control the politics and lifeworlds of both.

Rawat studies the dalits of UP and identifies three critical moments in the development of an autonomous and organized dalit politics which evolves from resistance to an abusive and degraded nomenclature to a caste federation.

It is clear that the thirty-three essays which follow speak to one another, sometimes exploring the same historical narrative on different registers: those on dalits of UP, Bengal, western, and southern India, for instance. Sometimes they argue with one another: Jaffrelot and Hardiman on the one hand, and Nagaraj on the other, have somewhat divergent views on the relationship between Ambedkar and Gandhian nationalism. At other times, several essays address shared debates: with Dumont, Wiser, or with nationalist historians. We were careful to select writings that are mutually inter-animating.

We also tried to preserve the integrity of the writings by reproducing entire chapters and articles in order to avoid cutting and pasting, but we cannot claim hundred per cent success: three or four pieces could not be reproduced in their entirety. In several essays, caste gets reframed by various other horizons: gender, class relations, nation, systems of knowledge. We did not try to cull the specific matter of caste out of them as we believed that no social category is a standalone, each being relational rather than exclusive or substantive.

The literature on caste is so voluminous that, in order to manage within two fat volumes, we had to our great disappointment to leave out much that we would have liked to include: much more, for example, from Bayly, Constable, Rao. We could not include essays by Valerian Rodrigues (on Ambedkar) and Neeladri Bhattacharya (on the codification of custom) which would have added greatly to the value of this collection. We were deeply disappointed at failing in all our efforts to contact Lucy Carroll or her publisher for permission to include her masterly study of caste associations. And much as we would have liked to include the work of Marc Galanter, the subject of caste, law, and reservations merits a volume by itsef.

We are extremely grateful to all the authors and to their publishers for their generous consent to be part of these volumes. Rukun Advani

has been a silent co-editor; and we thank S. Ghosh for securing permission from authors and publishers, many of whom expressed admiration for her efficiency. Anirban Bandyopadhyay helped us with assembling all the various contributions. Copyright details and acknowledgement of reproduction permissions are provided, whenever required, and in the form specified by the copyright owner, within the first footnote of each essay. Citation methods vary across the essays: efforts to standardize the variety would have required time and effort out of all proportion to the value.

We dedicate this collection to the teachers and students of Delhi University who are struggling, against impossible odds, to save their institution from imminent and brutal destruction.

SUMIT SARKAR AND TANIKA SARKAR, MAY 2013

1

Land and Labour in Late- Eighteenth-Century South India

The Golden Age of the Pariah?*

DAVID WASHBROOK

In recent years, interpretation of the history of agrarian social structure in India has undergone a remarkable transformation—one might say reversal. From perspectives which saw a static, ageless society of village communities broken open during the nineteenth century by the forces ofWestern capitalism and 'modernity', we have moved towards views of a highly mobile and economically differentiated society rendered stationary and 'traditional' by the processes of 'peasantisation' implicit in the colonial project (Ludden 1985; Bayly 1983 and 1988; Washbrook 1988). Thus far, however, explorations of this new perspective (as indeed of the old one) have been inclined to concentrate almost exclusively on the relations of commerce, investment, and market production. Much less attention has been paid to issues of labour, subsistence, and social reproduction. This seems a pity, not only for the narrowness and implicit class bias of the historiography but also because it overlooks a crucial set of forces informing, and perhaps determining, the specific forms of capitalist

exploitation and development. From some theoretical positions at least, such forms are not the simple or logical products of 'market expansion' but the complex outcomes of continuous processes of class struggle (Brenner 1976 and 1977).

Of course, what is meant by the term 'labour' in the context of eighteenth- (as of nineteenth- and twentieth-) century and South (and North, East, and West) India is somewhat problematic. Our concepts have been much affected by the rise, on the one side, of a capitalist modernity which would render the whole of the past in its own image; and, on the other, by a legacy of Orientalism, which would construe it as a mystery of Indological tradition. Labour is seen either as 'rightless' and 'proto-proletarian' from the beginning of time or else as deeply and immovably 'embedded' in the a-rational social systems supplied by custom, caste, and the jajmani system.

I

As much recent research has shown, however, neither perspective makes much sense of South Indian historical conditions. Caste status and actual occupation, for example, had become markedly differentiated long before the beginning of the colonial period (Ludden 1985). Equally, whether we accept Chicherov's view that the relations of the jajmani system were breaking down under the weight of commercial forces or Fuller's more radical view that the South never possessed the classic village-based jajmani system (and that its nineteenth-century 'remnants' were the remains of a quite different system of distribution), the conclusion for this period is much the same. South India's labour systems were not organized on jajmani principles but responded to the logic of wider 'state' and market influences (Chicherov 1971; Fuller 1977).

However, it would be no less problematic to suppose that these 'wider influences' constituted a system approximating to modern capitalism or even to late-nineteenth-century colonialism. Dharma Kumar's pioneering studies of land and labour in South India, for example, took mid-to-late nineteenth-century (caste-based) definitions of landless

labour and read them back into the beginnings of the colonial period. This produced a picture of considerable continuity with landless labourers representing about 15 per cent of the popu-lation (varying between 10 and 20 per cent by district) across the whole period (Kumar 1965). In later works, she also suggested that both the structure and the nature of landholding rights did not change greatly over the nineteenth century (Kumar 1975; but consider the different implications of Kumar 1983). Viewed in the economic and institutional contexts of 'late pre-colonial' and early Company South India, her definitions, and images of continuity, may be misleading.

If 'landless' labour were taken to mean labour 'without rights' to land or other means of subsistence, the concept would obscure more than it reveals. The pastoralist sectors of the economy were more highly developed at this time than later, and, in some areas, 'landless' groups were very much property-owning in other regards, such as livestock. Equally, since the seventeenth century, the expansion of the textile industry had drawn in labour from the lower levels of the agrarian economy and, again, many landless groups were not 'loom-less'. Further, most groups of agricultural 'labourers' possessed rights giving them access to, at the very least, shares in the agricultural product and, in many cases, even to 'personal' cultivating rights. In general, proprietary rights over land were described in terms of discrete shares in the social product, shares which included returns to labour. Also, and by no means infrequently, such shares included rights of access to cultivation (of 'garden' plots, and so on). Indeed, payment to 'non-agricultural' castes for their services often took the form of cultivating rights to 'inam' lands (Sivakumar 1978, ch. 5; Stein 1984). In these senses, membership of a 'landless labour caste' in the eighteenth century did not necessarily imply an absence of all 'property' and an entire reliance on the sale of 'labour power', as, to a considerable degree, it did later. Moreover and conversely, the 'ownership' of land did not imply full or absolute proprietary rights over territory as also it did later in the nineteenth century: the subsidiary claims on its products were not abrogable. Thus Dharma Kumar's sense of continuity masks a fundamental change in structures and categories.

But if the relations between property and labour in pre-modern South India did not reflect the complete separation of rights inherent in 'capitalism', what did they reflect and how should they be conceptualized? Another approach to them has focused on relations of agrestic servitude and bondage, and conceived them in terms of variations on the theme of slavery (Hjelje 1966; Gough 1981). There are, however, problems here too. Although Gough, in particular, would seem to want to generalize the existence of relations of personal, long-term servitude to the whole of 'South-East' India, they were common only in limited parts of the Kaveri delta (and in Malabar on the West coast). Outside the most intensive zones of 'wet' agriculture (that is, over the great mass of South India) they were scarcely found. Second, in any event, considering '*adimai* relations as an orchestration of the universal theme of 'slavery' is problematic because no class of *adimai* (except perhaps on the West coast) was without personal rights or treatable as simple chattel slaves. Most existed in relations of mutual obligation (for protection and subsistence) with their masters: relations which could be abrogated if obligations were not met or were violated. Of course, sometimes masters did violate their obligations; and sometimes too *adimai* did discover that their rights were more theoretical than real. But there is much to suggest that, at the level of moral norms, these rights were widely recognized: famously, seventeenth-century South Indian kings disapproved of the notions of chattel-slavery possessed by the Dutch (Raychaudhuri 1963). Moreover, as we shall see, the political and economic conditions of the eighteenth century favour the realisation of *adimai* rights since effective methods of coercion were difficult to apply.

It was a justificatory claim of colonialism to have 'freed' labour in South India from its traditional bondage, and much later writing about South India *adimai* seems to have caught its tone from that of the colonial authorities, with heavy emphasis placed on the most anomalous and abhorrent features of the latter's traditional and 'dominated' existence. However, as Gyan Prakash has recently reminded us and as debates in Marxism have started to contend, definitions of 'free' labour and 'freedom' under colonialism and capitalism are not

without their own blind spots (Prakash 1990; Cohen 1987). The concept of 'freedom' possesses very positive connotations in the liberal political vocabulary, and it has long been a task of ideologues of both capitalism and colonialism to 'free' labour from subjection to bonds of personal political constraint. However, it can scarcely be disguised that, under capitalism, 'freed' labour is then placed under an economic constraint (to reproduce itself through the labour market), which may threaten its subsistence more intensively than was the case before. This is not the least because the 'freeing' process may abrogate those rights which labour used to possess *vis-à-vis* its personal political oppressors, but offers labour no rights, beyond its supply and demand 'price', in the free market. (Marx, it may be remembered, consistently used the word '*vogelfrei*' to describe 'free' labour: this has none of the positive connotations of liberal freedom but is the medieval German legal term for a runaway serf, who is free in the sense of possessing no rights and who may be killed, captured or used at will.) Set against the harsh social realities facing 'freed' labour in the context of modern South India, it may be time to reassess the meanings—for labour itself—of its sometimes Babylonian captivity.

II

In the light of these various and many problems of concept and interpretation, it may be best to go back to basics and start with 'thick description' of the worlds of labour in the eighteenth century. Limitations of space, however, prevent that, so, here, I will only try to pick out a few distinctive features. First, as mentioned before, the economy was highly diversified in comparison to its late nineteenth-century successor. Besides pastoralism and artisanal manufacture, there was a substantial service sector around temples, courts, towns, and armies, which made heavy demands for labour. Statistics for this epoch are notoriously partial and unreliable. But several early-colonial surveys indicate that as little as 60 per cent of the workforce may have been engaged directly in agriculture (Ludden 1988).

The diversity of the economy, of course, also meant a high degree of specialization and hence of 'exchange' between sectors. Indeed, labour

was largely reproduced through exchange relations. This was not necessarily 'market' (that is, price rational) exchange: there remained many systems of re-distribution derived from the logic of temple, royal, and clan 'honours'. However, there is much evidence to suggest that money forms had penetrated most of these systems of exchange by the later medieval period, and that, by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, most responded to some species of price-rational logic (Hall 1980; Chaudhuri 1979). The relations of labour, even in agriculture, had partially been affected by these forces. Early British land surveys contained records of the crop-shares accorded to labour. As Sivakumar has shown, the differential proportion of these shares between various cropping regimes accords closely with a demand schedule of differential labour inputs—that is, the more labour involved in production, the higher the proportion of the crop deducted in labour payments (Sivakumar 1978, ch. 5). In zones of specialized rice and cash crop production, labourers received their shares in commodities which they did not consume. They were generally held responsible, themselves, for exchanging those commodities in the market against the dry grains which they ate. An early survey of commerce in the Ceded Districts, for example, suggested that common labourers were, proportional to their earnings, even more engaged in 'trade' than landholding farming families (Stein 1984). Both practically and symbolically, 'money' had become entwined in the relations of labour. Records of labourers' contracts indicate that a cash payment, as well as crop-shares and clothing, was generally part of the arrangement; in many cases, the public and symbolic presentation of a piece of money (inscribed with a king's head) was taken as the central act 'legally' constituting the contract (Baramahal Records VI, p. 27).

As might be expected in so specialized and exchange-related an economy, labour was also mobile—physically, sectorally, and even 'socially'. Except in a (very) few zones of irrigated agriculture, cultivation was ecologically and climatically unstable from season to season. 'Peasants' (of all shapes and sizes, including labouring families) moved between village sites on a regular basis. Lionel Place (the first Collector of the Chingleput jagir) estimated in the 1790s an annual rate of inter-

village population movement of around 13 per cent (Place 1795). According to its first Surveyor, a series of bad seasons in Ramnad district between 1810 and 1814 led about a third of its entire population to migrate temporarily to neighbouring Tanjavur district and the waters of the Kaveri delta (MDR Madura 9085, p. 215). Sometimes these movements involved whole local communities (large capital-providing farmers, petty peasants, and labourers) moving together en bloc. But there is much to suggest that both petty peasants and labourers (who, except at the level of caste, are not easily distinguishable) could move independently. Most village records indicate that land was offered on special concessionary rates to peripatetic *pykari* cultivators who would come in for a season or two to swell local levels of labour power and production. Indeed, certain dangerous agricultural terrains were wholly populated in this way. At the mouth of the Godaveri delta, for example, the riverine system occasionally threw up silt islands which, though immensely rich, were hazardous to cultivate due to 'fever' (probably malaria). They were known as 'pariah islands' because they were almost exclusively cultivated by pariahs *(parayan)* who were prepared to stand the risks in order to take the chance of making a quick financial killing (Madras Revenue Consultations, Report of Committee on Permanent Settlement, para 5240, IOL).

Of course, if this financial killing were made (and its physical price postponed), opportunities were opened up for wider economic and, to a degree, social mobility. In the agricultural economy, there remained some (although weakening) constraints on pariah castes 'possessing' land in their own right. However, they might come to perform economic roles similar to those of the lesser members of 'possessing' groups. In most areas, they could acquire livestock to add to the skills of their labour power. As most production regimes involved communal labour operations, they did much the same work as petty peasants, the difference being only that their rewards were calculated as a 'labour' share of the product rather than an 'owner's' share. But even this could be blurred: untouchable labour was permitted in its own right to cultivate *mam* lands belonging to the community of the 'possessors';

very often (especially in Tanjavur) it farmed land directly on sharecropping tenancy, just like poorer members of upper castes.

Moreover, besides enjoying some scope for mobility within the agricultural economy, 'landless' labour enjoyed much more outside it. Although the higher levels of skill in the weaving, construction, military, and other 'industries' were protected by (powerful) exclusionary corporate organizations, the lower levels could open up to pressures of demand. Equally, it was possible to start 'merchandizing' on very low levels of initial capital, even if upward mobility to the point of achieving accredited 'Chetty' status required substantially more capital—both real and 'symbolic'—than most erstwhile labouring groups were ever likely to acquire. When the late-nineteenth-century colonial authorities tried to match formal caste status to actual economic role and reward, they recorded at least the remnants of a system whose lack of rigidities left them utterly confused and bewildered. Nor was it only economic roles that failed to fit with the anticipation of varna- caste theory: it was also effective local status roles. The flexibilities of temple, clan, and royal honours systems meant that economic success was widely translated into social prestige, and the privileges claimed by various local groups of sometime common labouring origin were very variegated indeed (Appadurai and Appadurai 1976).

In comparison to the late nineteenth century, too, the returns to labour—of various kinds and various sorts—look remarkably high although also marked by much greater uncertainty. In agriculture, for example, standard wages through most of the second half of the nineteenth century would seem to have worked out at the equivalent of 2 seers (about 4 lbs) of grain (millet or unhusked paddy) per adult male per day. This represents 120 lbs per month. However, if the shares to labour recorded in the village surveys and papers of the eighteenth century were actually paid, they frequently work out, in good agricultural seasons, at the equivalent of over 200 lbs per month. That these figures might not be purely notional is suggested, further, by the level of wages which the European Companies had to pay to obtain 'coolie' labour. The standard one pagoda per month, paid through much of the second half of the eighteenth century, bought as much as 350 lbs

of paddy in good seasons and even 200 lbs in the inflationary closing years of the century. Indeed, if employment could be found in and around the army, earnings possibilities were almost limitless. The Company paid soldiers a fabulous 1.75 pagodas a month plus *batta* and loot; and the pickings for servants, coolies, and carriers were not negligible either. Moreover, the Company's Madras army contained an exceptionally large number of members of the pariah castes.

Much of the discussion of wage rates during the eighteenth century has been dominated by concern for artisan groups, particularly weavers, who saw a decline in their real returns due to rising commodity prices and, especially, the efforts of the English East India Company to subordinate them to the rhythms and imperatives of capital (Arasaratnam 1980). There can be little doubt that they suffered seriously from the 1770s onwards as the Company drove out most of its competitors and established a more effective monopoly over cloth production. However, quality weavers belonging to traditional weaving castes represented the 'elite' of the industry, and one pressure upon them, perhaps ultimately enabling the Company to break their corporate power, came from the proliferating number of pariah weavers beneath them, able to produce a range of coarse cloths of lower returns. But what, for artisan weavers, might seem a reduction in their circumstances could represent, for pariah weavers, a considerable increase in theirs. Even in the pinched conditions of the 1770s, weavers' wages regularly reached the equivalent of 240 lbs of paddy per month (Arasaratnam 1980).

The other side of this 'high-wage' economy, however, was constant danger. The climate was highly unstable; markets were extremely imperfect; and the fortunes of war blew hot and cold. In the event of famine—a continuous threat—notionally large wages and crop- shares might turn out to be worth nothing. Labourers must needs then turn to their patrons for protection and to see them through their difficulties. However, by the number of starving itinerants and vagrants who flooded into the fort and temple towns begging food and charity whenever crops failed, the generosity of regular patrons and employers was not particularly extensive and its quality suffered very little

straining. Casualties during famines tended to be heavy, and composed, principally, of the 'labouring' and pariah classes.

There were, however, several mechanisms which tried to cope with these instabilities. The most important was the 'advance' which then, as later, seems to have operated at all and every level of the economic system. Would-be employers and deployers of capital advanced a share of costs of production to producers and workers. Late-nineteenth-century colonial authorities railed against the apparent 'oppressions' of this system in their time since it involved workers and producers in consumption debt and left them with very little 'freedom' of control over disposal of the final product. And, in late-nineteenth-century circumstances, the system probably was 'oppressive'. However, under eighteenth-century conditions, the balance of power between labour and capital appears to have been very different. In the first place, levels of advance in relation to production costs were extremely high. Early South Indian Collectors, for example, were horrified at the level of the *taccavi* obligations which they were supposed to take over from renters and tax-farmers, and which they frequently claimed, on precious little evidence, must be the result of fraud. 'Up-front' payments of more than 20 per cent of the expected value of the crop were demanded by 'ryots', as was further provision for cattle and irrigation repair (MDR Coimbatore 607, pp. 297—302). In the cloth trade, advances of 50 or more per cent of final value were by no means uncommon (Parthasarathi 1990a). Even with regard to the hiring of agricultural labourers, the star pagoda, two cloths, bag of salt, and sack of grain, which were ritually handed over at the time of contracting, often had a combined value of a quarter or more of total expected annual payment (Baramahal Records VI, p. 27).

Second, ability of 'capital' to control both workers and the final product was also very limited, which increased 'risk'. Advances, once consumed on subsistence costs, were virtually irrecoverable in the event of market and production failures. Given peripatetic habits and possibilities, labour (including small peasants and artisans) responded to disaster simply by moving away (Ludden 1988). Equally, where market conditions were buoyant, it was difficult to prevent forward-

contracted producers from selling their product to other merchants where they could get a better price (Arasaratnam 1990). Indeed, it was widely regarded as a customary right, at times forcefully defended, that the contracts implicit in advances could be abrogated at any time before delivery simply by return of the advance. In the cloth trade, for example, what this meant (as the Company found to its cost) was that a weaver might finance production from one merchant's advance but then sell the product to another for a better price and merely return the cash to his original 'employer'. The system of advances meant that 'capital' was involved in bearing a heavy share of risk—which, of course, was greatly to the benefit of labour.

Behind this balance of power, a number of forces and factors can be seen at work. A first was the low land:man ratio, which put the value of labour at a premium. One *adimai* convention, which earned the deep opprobrium of colonial authorities, was that of selling attached labourers along with rights to land. But this custom might be seen to reflect less labour oppression than the great value possessed by labour, since without labourers the land rights had little, if any, value. Only in a few deltaic tracts was the guaranteed productive potential of any piece of land so great that it could command, and hold down, labour in long-term relations of apparent subservience. Elsewhere, land and landholders were chasing labourers and offering substantial shares in the social product for their services. Added to this, and as Sanjay Subrahmanyam has argued, there was a long-term trend in secular economic expansion, which must have involved an increasing demand for labour in the growing 'urban' commercial and manufacturing sectors of the economy (Subrahmanyam 1989).

Second, the structure of the state, and its ambiguous relationship to many forms of 'private' capital, made it difficult to erect structures of control capable of systematically compelling and coercing labour. By the eighteenth century, the South Indian state was a great deal more 'centralized' than any residual images of 'segmentation' might suggest. But the processes of centralization had promoted territorial divisions and competition between various regional and local authorities. This competition extended into the field of labour recruitment, with rulers

attempting to lure the workforce of their neighbours into their own territories and thus beating up the price of labour (Washbrook and Stein 1991). Of course, another side to this policy was a determination, sometimes backed with the use of savage penal violence, to keep their own workforces at home. But no state as yet possessed the bureaucratic apparatus necessary to sustain this coercion systematically: the occasional bouts of ritualized brutality, which many Europeans recorded and took as characteristic of the enfeebled position of labour in relation to 'Oriental Despotism', might be seen to mark the weakness of South Indian state authority rather than its strength.

Contributing to this weakness too was the uncertain relationship between the possessors of capital and the authority of the state. On the one hand, it was plainly in the interests of the emergent 'mercantilist' states of this epoch to secure more firmly the control of merchant capitalists over producers and production. Indeed, as cash became ever more central to the reproduction of military power, this was less an interest than a requisite. However, the ruler's concern was to maximize his own returns from the development of commerce, not the levels of profit being retained by merchant capital itself. Hence, there was not only co-operation between ruler and merchant but also much conflict: conflict in which merchant capitalists lined up with and protected the independent rights of producers, along with themselves, against the increasing demands and encroachments of the state (Washbrook and Stein 1991). Revenue farmers and monopoly licensees by no means always found it in their interests to maximize the powers of exploitation notionally lent them by the state, and the rewards of labour expanded in the interstices of this conflict.

But third, and perhaps most importantly, labour at virtually all levels of the economic system was corporately organized and capable of putting up its own fierce resistance. This is most obvious in the case of those forms of labour which possessed greatest independent resources of 'skill' and 'tooling'. Specialist weaving groups, for example, showed their corporate power on the Andhra coast in the 1720s and 1730s: the four principal castes organized strikes against the East India Company's attempts to beat down the price of cloth, and, according to Prasannan

Parthasarathi, successfully sustained the product share of weaving against reductions in the profit margins to spinning and merchandizing (Parthasarathi 1990a). Equally, in interior districts, peasant clan organization strongly resisted the attempts of 'military fiscalist' states to increase the share of the product extracted from them as revenue. In the riverine tracts, matters were more complicated by the extent to which dominant landholding corporations had long been penetrated by a commercial land market: in areas such as the Kaveri and Godaveri deltas, village landholding rights were parcelled out between families of promiscuous origin arid identity. However, the ideology and symbology of 'joint' *kaniachikarrar* possession continued to hold, and, ultimately, managed to force even the early Company state to abandon its original intentions of imposing individualist 'ryotwari' settlements on these regions (Ludden 1985).

But corporate principles of organization reached much deeper down the labour and production processes than this, embracing even 'landless' and 'untouchable' labour. No class of labour was held to be entirely without specialist skills or resources or rights. Indeed, the social relations of production might be conceptualized as consisting of the intersection of several tiers of right-bearing and corporately organized labour, each with independent, though differential, claims to a share in the social product. In the case of 'untouchable' labouring groups, outside a few deltaic tracts where relations similar to those of village-based nineteenth-century caste 'domination' seem already to have existed, most belonged to wider territorial corporations, which protected their 'skills' and even negotiated their price. This was most obviously true of tank-diggers, shepherds, artisans, and ritual specialists. But, over most of the South, it included also common agricultural labourers. In Chingleput in the 1780s, for example, most farm labourers were hired formally on seasonal contracts (which might, of course, be renewed annually through an entire or several lifetimes). At the end of each season, labouring families ritually 'withdrew' from their employers' villages, waiting to be 'invited' back for re-hiring at festivals involving role reversals and 'king-for-a-day' celebrations. Behind this independence, there lay influential 'caste' organizations, which showed

their power in these years by orchestrating territorially extensive labour strikes against attempts by the Company to increase taxation on the social product and thus to reduce the effective shares available to labour (Sivakumar 1978, ch. 5).

In other contexts, too, the 'power' possessed by pariahs was widely manifested. Early Company officials were particularly afraid of the violence wrought by uprisings of pariahs during famine and dearth, and, as in the Masulipatnam famine of 1790, intervened extensive in the grain market and to distribute food in order to preserve social order. Market reports suggesting the imminence of food shortages and high prices were checked against the 'restlessness' of pariah groups (MDR Masulipatnam 2799, pp. 512—14). These fears reflected the extent to which pariahs frequently possessed the reputation of being 'hard men' with attributes of physical strength and an aptitude for violence. In religious festivals, not only were they given the heavy duties of pulling the massive carts on which rode the deities (who, on these occasions at least, do not seem to have objected to the proximity of the unclean), but they were used as the shock-troops of caste factionalism. Invariably, reports on riots between castes of the 'Left-' and 'Right-hand' noted that, when Right-hand factions mobilized for violence, pariah castes (who mostly belonged to the Right) took up, or were pushed, into forward positions and led the charge (Military Sundries 88, pp. 1—307, Tamilnadu Archives).

To a degree of course, their very 'uncleanness' may have given them power since, from the perspective of 'clean' Left-hand castes, they possessed—and were—poisoned weapons. The Company noticed and made use of this when employing pariah troops: they were held to be particularly good for tax-collecting duties since the upper-caste wealthy would often pay up on the spot just to keep them out of their houses. This sense of 'uncleanness', however, did not derive only from varna notions of purity: also and, in most Tamil contexts probably more importantly, it derived from the extent to which pariahs were associated with the forces of untamed nature and the spirit world residing in the 'barbarous' forests, which surrounded and pressed in on agricultural settlements. Low-caste groups were held to be migrants from the forest

world (even when they had been settled for generations) and, in Tamilnad no less than in Prakash's Bihar, much of the ritual symbology of pariah identity emphasized and sustained myths of these 'fearsome' origins (for Bihar, see Prakash 1990).

It is also by no means impossible that, besides being mythologically 'wild', many groups of pariahs in the eighteenth century were, in fact, extremely strong physically. Recent work on low-caste diets in Tamilnadu has suggested that a major reason for their present fragile physiological condition lies in the poor nutrition obtained from the 'broken' and inferior quality rice on which most agricultural labourers now subsist. In the eighteenth century, by contrast, pariah diet, even in rice-growing areas, seems to have consisted much more of millets and dry grains, which, though inferior in status, were far more nutritious. Also, more extensive pastoralism meant the easier availability of meat. Certainly, the officers of the Company army did not notice any generalized 'physical debasement' among pariah groups but recruited them extensively for 'fighting' as well as menial duties.

III

It is against this broad background of eighteenth-century labour conditions that I wish to argue the case for the closing decades of that century having been something of a 'Golden Age' for pariahs and for labouring groups. This golden age, however, did not last, and, by the early years of the nineteenth century agricultural labour's long march into 'modern' destitution and despoliation was already under way. Familiarly, the second half of the eighteenth century has been seen as a period of intensified warfare and 'disturbance' occasioned by the breakup of the Mughal empire and the subsequent struggle for succession between a variety of regional states. Habib has taken the conditions of disturbance to have been detrimental to the interests of labour and the poor in general, and no doubt they were for a substantial group of the 'middling-poor'—such as landholding peasants and skilled artisans (Habib 1964). However, for those groups who had been at the very bottom of the *ancien regime's* social order, the epoch offered a number of rare opportunities. In the first place, and most simply, the

wars of the period increased the demand for labour of a wide variety of kinds. Armies need fortifications, whose building regularly stripped the surrounding countryside of tankdiggers and other construction workers. They also needed servants in large numbers with, by contemporary estimates, six labourers being needed to keep one cavalryman and his horse in the field. As there may have been as many as a quarter of a million cavalrymen south of the Vindhyas in these years, potential sources of employment were not scarce. Armies also needed transport workers, their baggage trains frequently stretching for twenty or more miles behind them. And some armies, such as that of the Company, even needed soldiers from among the pariah classes. Of course, and hardly surprisingly, many efforts were made by the military to obtain this labour—without paying for it—through 'pressing', 'corvee levies', and the like. But the disturbed political conditions worked against the successful application of coercive control and, in the end, most rulers found themselves having to spend lavishly to meet their needs. During the 1970s, Tipu Sultan was thought to have been spending two crores of pagodas a year on the defences of Seringapatnam. As noted earlier, the Company paid its (often pariah) sepoys well over the odds for common labourers.

But the political conflicts of the period were fought out as much for economic as for military superiority. The 'mercantilist' or 'fiscalist' states of the era competed against one another for trade, cash, and to feed their increasingly mercenary and expensive armies. In several different ways, their competition would offer benefits to labour. First, it bid up the price of inducements to workers to shift their location. Between the 1760s and 1780s, for example, Hyder Ali spent heavily on irrigation works at the headwaters of the Kaveri, and offered favourable terms to all migrant cultivators, especially from 'enemy' Tanjavur downriver. Second, commercial production expanded, creating new opportunities for labouring groups. The East India Company, for example, started to concentrate on high-quality long cloth, and sought to expand production of this variety at the expense of others. Such cloth was produced by the most skilled and specialized of weaving groups who, in turn, increased their own demand for fine yarn. Most classes of the

rural population had performed spinning as an important by-employment during the slack parts of the agricultural season. However, the new levels of demand meant that spinning could become a specialized occupation in its own right. In the Company's Chingleput weaving parganas by the 1770s, for example, whole villages of pariahs had been established to service the provision of yarn at the expense of other agricultural duties (Diary of C. Smith in MPP, 1771). Further, demand for other, coarser, varieties of cloth also increased: French and Dutch traders sought 'blues' for the Caribbean and South East Asian slave markets, and indigenous demand, perhaps related to expanding armies and court centres, also grew. Such cloth could be made by less skilled pariah weavers, and, with the Company using increasingly coercive methods to hold 'professional' weavers to its obligations, large parts of the coarse-cloth market became available to pariah interlopers. In some parts of Andhra, for example, it was reported that Company weavers leased their looms to pariahs at night so that the latter could produce coarse varieties (MDR Godavari 830, pp. 1—64).

The growing demand for labour 'off' the land—in 'service' and 'industry'—inevitably affected the supply of labour in agriculture itself. As low-caste groups deserted the land to follow armies and occupy towns, the bargaining position of those remaining tended to improve. An examination of village records reveals many shifts in the distribution of rights over these years. In Chingleput, where Brahmans had usually let the lands in their villages to Pali hereditary tenants, the latter were frequently able to force an entry to full 'mirasi' status. In much of Mysore, Brahman *inamdars* 'sold' shares in their privileged rights to tenants and labourers in order to keep the latter on the land (MDR Chingleput 448, pp. 30—58). Occasionally, direct military conflict further aided this process. Famously, in 1780 the Mysore army invaded 'downriver' Northern Tanjavur and force-marched back a large number of its 'principal inhabitants' along with their cattle, personal 'slaves', and agricultural implements, in order to populate the newly-irrigated waters of the upper Kaveri. What this did in Northern Tanjavur itself, however, was to give the 'sub-principal' inhabitants, who managed to escape or were left behind, direct access to the land. In this

context, even a number of pariah groups contrived, albeit often briefly, to gain vaunted 'mirasidar' status and rights for themselves.

Structural shifts in the relationship between several of the different privileged corporations of *ancien regime* society helped further to increase the pressures from below. While, at one level, military rulers, merchant capitalists and land- and resource-holders shared interests in the development of commerce, at another level they were daggers drawn over the distribution of its profits. Major conflicts periodically broke out between rulers, merchants, and labour-controllers (landlords, 'head' artisans, and so on), conflicts from which the poorer labouring elements could gain. In the cloth trade, for example, the Company progressively weakened the position of merchants and head- weavers, and, for a time, offered securer conditions of employment to common weavers than they had previously enjoyed (Parthasarathi 1990b). In Malabar, Tipu Sultan's ferocious attack on Nayar and Nambudiri privileges drove the latter groups out of their homes and into hiding, and temporarily offered the land (and the protections of Islam) to their 'slaves' and labourers. In Karnataka proper, Tipu's various manoeuvrings were aimed at breaking the privileges of the 'dominant' and seeking direct alliances between the state and the subordinate corporations of society. Theoretically at least, his 'ryotwari' system would have offered land on a direct and individual basis to whomever would take it, regardless of caste or status. In its own way too, the Company was reaching beneath the structure of privilege in South Indian society by offering pariahs levels of reward and status (especially in the army), which social convention denied them, and using them to 'attack' superior vested interests (MDR Tanjore 3267, pp. 81-5).

For a brief period, then, and as many contemporaries claimed, the world appeared to be turning on its head: with pariahs and other ne'er-do-wells owning land and wealth and developing social pretensions, while Brahmans and respectable people were murdered in their beds and chased by marauding armies. But the world was soon to turn right-side up again and, 'the golden age of the pariah' was destined not to last. By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, most of the political and economic conditions sustaining the new order had collapsed. In

part, as Christopher Bayly has seen, this collapse followed from the logic of the Company's achievement of 'imperial' supremacy. The several court and military centres, whose rivalry had generated competitive market forces, were dismantled to give way to a single imperial authority, which could better monopolize and monopsonize the economy. The Company's supremacy meant a generalized demilitarization and a paring down of the overblown service sector which had been so important in stimulating demand. Hundreds of thousands of people were forced to labour in agriculture for want of other opportunities. Labour's price on the land soon began to fall (Bayly 1983).

In the weaving industry, the new situation also meant that the Company finally managed to dominate artisanal corporations, obliging them to produce its cloth cheaply and cutting out much of the coarse-cloth production which had offered employment to pariahs (Arasaratnam 1980). From 1830, the weaving industry received another near-mortal blow with the abandonment of the 'investment', and the opening up of the high-quality market to foreign competition. These factors, together with the export of specie, induced a swingeing depression which lay over the economy until the 1850s, and reflected a reduced demand for everything, including labour.

But it was not simply the functioning of 'impersonal' market forces which pushed the lower levels of South Indian society back from their most recent gains; nor were they pushed back merely to their subordinate position of about 1740. Rather, they fell back as a result of deliberate Company policies aimed at reducing their independence and share in the social product; and they fell back to positions of domination and exploitation which they had scarcely known earlier. These policies were couched in the familiar, and apparently contradictory, terms of most Company policies at the time; an inchoate mixture of desires to 'restore' South Indian society to its proper basis in the 'ancient Hindu' order, and, simultaneously, to reform and modernize it for participation in the ninenteenth-century world economy. The contradictions, however, are easily resolved when their implications for the situation of labour are considered.

In contrast perhaps to Bayly's North India, it would be less possible to argue that the political conflicts of the eighteenth century had not affected the performance of the economic base. In certain important areas, the struggles between contending mercantilist powers had led to the destruction of irrigation works, the dispersal of artisanal populations, and the decline of trade. Moreover, and even more certainly, these conditions had created, and reflected, a serious crisis in the profitability of capital, which had to bear heavier risks and distribute a larger share of surplus to labour. On assuming 'imperial' power, the Company set out both to expand valuable forms of production (which, for it, meant mostly agricultural production) and to increase the profit levels achieved by capital. This involved a marked change in its attitudes towards labour.

In its earliest days as an Indian regional power, in the manner of other mercantilist states of the period, it had found itself brought into conflict with many of the dominant corporations controlling the largest shares of the social product. From Tipu Sultan, it borrowed the radical 'ryotwari' revenue system, and even when, as from 1795 to 1805, it toyed with the idea of a Permanent Settlement, it proposed setting levels of revenue demand so high that they would soak the possessing classes. The new position of authority which it enjoyed after 1805, however, began to suggest the need for a new perspective, especially with regard to agriculture (in the sphere of commerce, it continued to be deeply suspicious of mercantile and banking corporations, and sought to displace their functions with those of its own bureaucracy and the allied interests of British capital). While, notionally, agriculture could be expanded by pure ryotwari means (giving the land directly to whomever would labour on it), the reality was rather different. Agricultural development needed capital and, if the Company were to cut out the more privileged corporations on the land, it must needs provide all that capital itself. The logic of the early ryotwari settlements proposed this, with the revenue authorities obliged for heavy investments in irrigation and *taccavi.* But the risks were high and the Company soon began to look for ways to encourage 'private' capital back into agriculture, and hence for means of re- accommodating the

privileged classes. In some regions, there were other reasons for doing this too. In North Tanjavur and Malabar, Tipu's policies had driven off large sections of the erstwhile privileged classes. On the principle of 'my enemy's enemy is my friend', these groups had to have their positions restored lest it appear that the Company cared little for fellow victims of Tipu's 'tyranny'.

The re-enfranchisement of the privileged classes, of course, had serious implications for the lesser-privileged and labouring groups who had gained from the former's plight. In many places, most notably North Tanjavur and Malabar, '*mirasidars*' and '*jenmis*' returned after absences of a decade or more, to take back, with Company authority, the lands and rights which others had enjoyed. Equally, the Company started to scrutinize village records and, especially, *inam* grants to hunt out 'imposters' who had, 'illegitimately' by its understanding of 'tradition', bought into or acquired rights given in the distant past by gods, kings, and temples. Again here, many of the gains of the later eighteenth century were taken away.

But mere 'restoration' of the ancient Hindu order was never going to be enough. The Company of necessity demanded a far higher share of surplus than any previous state and, if its share was to be found and 'privileged' groups on the land were still to have some material underpinnings to their privilege, somebody else must pay. Eventually, the 'deal' brokered between the Company and the variety of *mirasidars, inamdars,* and 'village headman' with whom it effectively treated, centred on the progressive destruction of labour's independence and rights and share in the social product.

This took many forms, some invoking 'tradition', others involving the modern laws of contract. In response to the petitions of local *mirasidars* that labour was too scarce and expensive for them to extend cultivation, the Madras army decided that it was now against custom for pariahs to be employed as Company soldiers, dismissed those in its ranks, and agreed not to hire any more. Equally, in 1797 after several painful battles with pariah caste organizations centred on Madras city, the Collector of the Chingleput Jaghir persuaded his colleagues in the city

that such organizations could not be broken while Madras acted as a haven of alternative opportunity and employment for erstwhile agricultural labour (MDR Chingleput 448, pp. 30-58). He urged that laws be passed to eject casual labourers from the city, and this policy soon spread to most other major towns as well. In sharp contrast to the eighteenth century (when pariahs may have constituted one-third of the population of Madras city), by the late nineteenth century untouchables represented barely ten per cent of urban populations. Further, in several districts and in spite of the fact that to do so was technically illegal, Collectors put the local authorities to work in capturing and returning 'runaway' slaves. Indeed, the law itself began to become involved in this task albeit by disguised means; while the courts showed a characteristic British ambivalence towards recognizing indigenous 'slavery', they certainly allowed that 'debtors' could be forcibly restrained. As (due as much to the 'advance' system as anything else) all labourers were technically in debt to their employers, the courts thus were able to issue notices of constraint against most 'runaways' while not formally committing themselves to the legality of 'slavery'.

But perhaps the most devastating long-term blow to the position of labour was the convention established by the courts, in the wake of attempt to institutionalize 'landed' property, that non-real rights, such as claims to grain shares, were not enforceable at law, and that agricultural wages ought to be determined by the laws of supply and demand (which, of course, were 'natural' laws determined by God and with which the laws of Man had no business interfering). At a stroke this abrogated, or at least rendered unenforceable, an enormous class of rights previously possessed by labour, and, in the context of depression, loss of alternative employment and an enforced movement of population back to the land, guaranteed the driving down of the price of labour.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the pattern of the future had clearly been set; or rather the baseline of 'tradition', whence later nineteenth century changes could be judged as progress, had been laid. The first wage censuses of the 1860s revealed levels of payment to labour whose grain equivalents, if more regularly received, were far less

—sometimes half—those common in the eighteenth century; and which, given the expansion of production, represented a substantial reduction in relative shares of the social product (Kumar 1965). Equally, the first regular survey of *inams* (in 1869) told the story of a veritable revolution from above: whereas, for example, Munro's first (1804) *inam* survey of the Ceded Districts had shown the 'village officer' class holding only 22 per cent of *inam* rights, and a huge miscellaneous population of village servants and labourers holding a substantial share of the rest, by 1869 the former had come to enjoy nearly 70 per cent of such rights and the latter hardly any at all (Stein 1984). Further, labour's habitual mobility, which had done so much to sustain its price, had been reduced to the point at which, in the first general census of 1871, over 96 per cent of the people of the Madras Presidency were found to be living in the districts in which they had been born.

Nor was it only changing material relations which altered the situation of labour. The expansion of cultivation and the reciprocal cutting back of the forests, besides reducing the scope of pastoralism, also removed pariahs further from the sources of 'barbarous wildness' whence they had drawn much of their mystique and metaphorical strength. In concert with the 'Brahmanization' of caste ideology, then taking place also under British influence, this created a context in which pariahs became, culturally as well as physically, the 'unclean' and degenerative sub-humanoid species, which caste society in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries held them unequivocally to be (Barnett 1975). The instruments of 'capitalist' modernization and of Indian tradition had combined perfectly to produce, for the property-holding classes of colonial India, the kind of dominated labour force that they and their white masters most needed and wanted.

References

The following abbreviations have been used:

IESHR: Indian Economic and Social History Review IOL: India Office Library and Records.

MDR: Madras District Records, Tamilnadu and Andhrapradesh Archives. MPP: Madras Public Proceedings, India Office Library.

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2

The Original Caste

Power, History and Hierarchy in South Asia*

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> Traditionally, power was what was seen, what was shown and what was manifested and, paradoxically, found the principle of its force in the movement by which it deployed that force. Those on whom it was exercised could remain in the shade; they received light only from that portion of power that was conceded to them, or from the reflection of it that for a moment they carried.—Foucault 1979: 187

The Politics of Caste

In pre-colonial Hindu India, the king—both as a historical figure and as a trope for the complex political dynamics underlying the Indian social order—was a central ordering factor in the social organization of caste. This statement directly opposes the prevailing theories of comparative sociology, and in particular the theoretical position of Louis Dumont (1980). As is well known, Dumont holds that the political and economic domains of social life in India are encompassed by the religious. The religious principle becomes articulated in terms of the opposition of purity and impurity. For

Dumont, the Brahman represents the religious principle, inasmuch as the Brahman represents the highest form of purity attainable by Hindus. The king, while important and powerful, represents the political domain, and is accordingly inferior to, and encompassed by, the Brahman.

There are in fact many textual confirmations of the view that Brahmans, and the spiritual authority *(brahma)* that they possess, are seen as higher, both relationally and ontologically, than kings, and the temporal authority *(ksatra)* that is theirs. However, these same texts provide evidence as well of what has been called 'the central conundrum of Indian social ideology (Trautmann 1981: 285; also see Heesterman 1978). At times the king is above the Brahman, as for example in the royal consecration ceremony. At other times the Brahman appears to be superior to the king, as for example in the Manu Dharmasastra, and in passages from the Mahabharata. This conundrum is often addressed in terms of the postulation of two levels of truth, a higher level at which the Brahman is clearly pre-eminent, the source of everything else, and a lower level at which kings must protect and sponsor Brahmans in order for them to exist, as gods, on earth. Dumont's resolution of this conundrum extends the notions of higher and lower truths from a classically Indic epistemological contextuality to his well-known ontological separation of the religious from the political. The major development of political thought in India, he contends, is the secularization of kingship, that is, the separation of the magico-religious nature of kingship—preserved in the form of the royal chaplain in particular and in the function of Brahmans in the larger polity more generally—from the political aspects of kingship, depicted, inter alia, in the Machiavellian *Arthasastra* (Dumont 1962).

While Dumont is not wrong to insist on radical differences in the 'ideologies' of India and the West, the irony is that the way in which he postulates the difference is based on a fundamentally Western ideology, in which religion and politics must be separated. Dumont's position in many ways caricatures the Orientalist assumption that India is the spiritual East, devoid of history, untouched by the politics of Oriental despotisms. Critics of Dumont have often accepted his basic

epistemological premises, but then reversed them. They take a materialist perspective and view social relations in India in terms of power, pure and simple (e.g. Berreman 1971). Recent work—often by those influenced by an ethnosociological approach to the study of India —has suggested that this separation of religion from politics, like many other dichotomies in Western social science, is inappropriate at the level of ideological (or cultural) analysis in Indian social thought (Appadurai 1981; Dirks 1982, 1987; Marriott and Inden 1977; McGilvray 1982). It is in this sense—and in particular in my analysis of the cultural poetics of power—that the following analysis is ethno- sociological.

Not only is there no fundamental ontological separation of a 'religious' from a 'political' domain, but religious institutions and activities are fundamental features of what we describe here as the political system. Kings derive much of their power from worship, and bestow their emblems and privileges in a cultural atmosphere that is permeated by the language and attitudes of worship. Further, temples are key institutions in the formation of social communities (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1976), even while they reflect structures of power worked out both in and outside their own walls (Dirks 1987; 285—305, 358—83). In turn, temples represent the pre-eminent position of the king by granting him the highest honour in the temple, before even the learned *(srotriya)* Brahman. Religion does not encompass kingship any more than kingship encompasses religion. There are not two distinct forms of power, secular power had by kings and sacred power had by Brahmans. Kings and Brahmans are both privileged but by different forms of divinity in a world in which all beings were, however distantly, generated from the same ontological source. And power—whether defined as a constellation of cultural conceits or as an analytic concern —cannot be restricted to a single domain of Indian social life.

Dumont has suggested that caste is fundamentally religious, and that religious principles actualize themselves in the domain of purity and pollution. In my ethnohistorical study of a south Indian kingdom in which Kallars were the royal caste and Brahmans were heavily patronized according to scripturally mandated forms of royal gifting activity, I have found that purity and pollution are not the primary

relational coordinates which endow hierarchy with its meaning and substance. Royal honour *(mariyatai, antastu)* combined with the notions of restriction, command, and order *(kattupatu, atikaram, orunku*) are the key discursive components which are embedded in, and productive of, the nature and order of hierarchical relations.

My analysis will, I hope, do more than simply contest Dumont over the issue of which key terms underlie the structural logic of hierarchy in South Asia. Indeed, I wish to reintroduce concerns with power, hegemony, and history into studies of culturally constructed structures of thought, whether structuralist or ethnosociological. The forms and relations of power in southern India efface social scientific distinctions of materialist etics from culturalist emics, for even an analysis of ritual action and language suggests the complex and conjunctural foundations of hierarchical relations. At least this is true among the Kallars of Pudukkottai, less affected perhaps than most other groups by colonialism and the demise of the old regime in the nineteenth century. For the concerns of comparative sociology are not only the products of a nineteenth-century Orientalism, but also of the colonial intervention that removed the politics from society and created a contradictory form of civil society—with caste as its fundamental institution—in its place. It was not only convenient to render caste independent of political variables, but necessary to do so in order to rule an immensely complex society by a variety of indirect means. Colonial sociology represented the eighteenth century as decadent, and all legitimate Indian politics as past. Under colonialism, caste was appropriated, and in many respects reinvented, by the British (see Dirks 1989). However, the British were able to change caste because caste continued to be permeable to political influence. Ethnohistorical reconstruction is thus important not only for historians confronting new problems of data and analysis, but for anthropologists who confront in their fieldwork a social system that was decapitated by colonial rule.

Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom

The Kallars, like the Maravars, settled in mixed economy zones (Ludden 1985) such as Pudukkottai on the borders of the central political and

economic regions of the south. In these areas they quickly attained dominance in late medieval times by exercising rights of protection *(patikkaval)* over local communities and institutions. The Kallars were successful in this role because their strong kin- and territory-based social structure and cultural valuation of heroism and honour were highly conducive to the corporate control of the means of violence and coercion. It was no accident that Kallars, like Maravars, were often, when not granted rights of protection, the very groups from which others sought protection.

The Tondaiman dynasty of Kallar kings wrested control over a significant swathe of the Pudukkottai region in central Tamil Nadu in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. Whereas Kallars had been branded as thieves in much early Tamil literature and as criminals by the British under the Criminal Tribes Act, in Pudukkottai—a little kingdom that became the only Princely State in the Tamilspeaking region of southern India—they became the royal caste. Kallars controlled much of the land, occupied the greatest number of authoritative positions, particularly as village and locality headmen and as *miracidars,* and ran the most important temples as trustees. These temples were often their lineage, village, or sub-caste-territorial *(natu)* temples, in which they received honours only after the king and Brahmans. In short, Kallars were dominant not only in terms of their numbers, but for economic, political, and ritual reasons.

Pudukkottai, which at its most extensive did not exceed 1200 square miles, was located in an exclusively rainfed agricultural zone right in the middle of the Tamil-speaking region of southern India, straddling the boundary between what had been the two great medieval Tamil kingdoms. Ruled by Kallar kings, it provides an excellent place to test many of the proposals of Dumont, who, before he shaped the concerns of much contemporary Indian anthropology in his general proposals and in *Homo hierarchicus,* portrayed Kallars in his major ethnographic work in India as a ritually marginal group that exemplified the Dravidian isolation of kinship from the influence of caste hierarchy. But in Pudukkottai, less than one hundred miles north of where Dumont conducted his fieldwork, Kallars were *kings*; they exercised every

conceivable kind of dominance and their social organization reflects this fact.

Pudukkottai rose, as did other little kingdoms throughout southern India, within the context of a late medieval Hindu political order. In both its emergence to and its maintenance of power, it exemplified the social and military vitality of certain productively marginal areas in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a period that has commonly been characterized as one of decline and decadence. But the eighteenth century was not the 'black century'; the decentralization of political forms was neither a condemnation of the capabilities of the Indian state nor a natural prelude to British colonial rule (see Bayly 1983). The British conquest of the little kings in the south was anything but absent-minded, and there are indications that not only was the economy buoyant in part because of the active court centres ruled by these little kings, but the small and local-level states were learning the political, military, and administrative lessons that the French and the English were learning at the same time. But win the British did, and thus their version of the eighteenth century has collaborated with a subsequent neglect of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by Western and Indian historians to provide the grist for comparative sociology's Indian mill.

Colonialism purposefully preserved many of the forms of the old regime, nowhere more conspicuously than in the indirectly ruled Princely States. But these forms were frozen, and only the appearances of the old regime (without its vitally connected political and social processes) were saved. Colonialism changed things both more and less than has commonly been thought. While introducing new forms of civil society and separating these forms from the colonial state, colonialism also arrested some of the immediate disruptions of change by preserving many elements of the old regime. But by freezing the wolf in sheep's clothing it changed things fundamentally. Paradoxically, colonialism seems to have created much of what is now accepted as Indian 'tradition', including an autonomous caste structure with the Brahman clearly at the head, village-based systems of exchange, isolated

ceremonial residues of the old regime state, and fetishistic competition for ritual goods that no longer played a vital role in the political system.

In my research on Pudukkottai, it took little study of local land records to uncover the most surprising historical characteristic of the political system: how little of the land was taxed (Dirks 1979). According to mid-nineteenth-century records, less than 30 per of the cultivated land was either taxed (9 per cent) or given out from year to year on a share basis (18 per cent) in which one-ninth of the produce was accorded to village servants and four-ninths each to the cultivator and the government. Seventy per cent of the cultivated land was *inam* or tax-free. This mid-nineteenth-century statistic was, if anything, far higher in the eighteenth century, when there were at the very least another 5000 military *inams,* i.e. 40 per cent more than the total number of *inams* in the mid-nineteenth century, before the gradual dismantlement of the military system of the state. Roughly 30 per cent of the *inams* (numbers of *inam* units rather than acreage) were for military retainers, their chiefs, and for palace guards and servants; 25 per cent were for village officers, artisans, and servants; and the remaining 45 per cent were for the support of temples, monasteries, rest and feeding houses for Brahman priests and pilgrims, and land grants to Brahman communities. In terms of acreage, roughly 19 per cent of the alienated land was for military retainers and others, 7 per cent for village officers, artisans, and servants, 51 per cent for temples, monasteries, and charities, and 22 per cent for Brahmans. Remember that these statistics reflect a demilitarized political system, so that both the numbers and percentages had earlier been far higher for military categories. Remember also that this particular kingdom was ruled over by kings said by most observers to be an unclean caste, inappropriate for Hindu kingship, and therefore inappropriate donors for Sanskritic temples and Brahmans.

This structure of privileged landholding reflects the structure of political power and socio-cultural participation within state and village institutions. The chief landholders were the great Kallar Jagirdars and Cervaikarars. The former were collateral relations of the Raja. Jagir estates were created for the two brothers of the Raja after a succession

dispute in 1730 severely threatened the stability of the state. These collateral families kept these estates intact until their settlement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The jagirs were, in effect, mini kingdoms in their own right, each containing a small court and a full set of *inam* grants, including 'military ones'. Importantly, however, the jagirs were not made up of contiguous villages and were therefore never geographically isolable units.

Just below the Jagirdars came the Cervaikarars. All but one of the Cervaikarars were of the same sub-caste as the Raja, and most had one or more affinal ties with the royal family. The Cervaikarars were given large grants of land, titles, honours, and emblems. Each of the Cervaikarars was awarded a specified number of retainers, or Amarakarars, to serve them at home, to go to battle with them abroad, and to carry their honours and emblems to ritual occasions in the royal court and in temples. Lesser chiefs, called Kurikarars, came from Kallar sub-castes other than the royal one. Lands and privileges throughout the state were also given to other Kallars, called in diminutive form Cervais, to keep watch over villages and localities not dominated by loyal Kallars (i.e. all groups other than the Vicenki Nattu Kallars who were only finally brought under nominal control in a series of wars in the late eighteenth century). The Cervais were mostly members of the royal sub-caste who had no affinal ties with the royal family.

The royal family and court was itself protected by Uriyakarars, all of whom were Akampatiyars, members of a non-Kallar caste which was aligned with the Kallars through membership in a metacaste of three warrior groups along with the Maravars called *mukkulattur*. These royal protectors in fact became a separate caste marked off from other Akampatiyars in the region by virtue of their connection with and service to the Raja. A number of Uriyakarar chiefs had a prominent role in the kingdom. Like most of the lesser chiefs, these chiefs were given extensive lands but no formal group of military retainers under them.

In addition, within each village in the state, headmen were given lands in recognition of their rights of local authority as well as to render this representative of the state's power at large. These headmen came

from the locally dominant castes. Kallars were dominant in the northern and eastern parts of the state. Maravars had a significant presence in the south. *Ampalams* (the title for headman, literally meaning the central common ground of the village, used by most of the castes in Pudukkottai) were also called *miracidars* after the mid-eighteenth century. This new label, borrowed from Persian revenue terminology, was used in an attempt to render local authority as dependent as possible on recognition by the 'bureaucratic' state. Nonetheless, well into the twentieth century these local headmen were often as powerful as small kings, with retinues and legends sufficient to cause their power to be felt over significant areas of the countryside.

Various village officials, artisans, and servants were also given *inam* (more properly *maniyam)* lands by the state. In addition to this land, each village servant was also rewarded with shares of the village grain heap. Since the one-ninth share of the harvest that was owed to village servants was taken from the grain heap before its division into the Raja's and the village's share, this classic *jajmani* payment was borne equally by the village and the Raja. Thus, the sets of relations usually characterized as *jajmani,* that is, as an institution of the village community alone, were sanctioned and underwritten not only by the community but also by the king both through *inams* and the share system. *Maniyam,* the term used for many village grants, meant land that was held free of tax, as well as privilege in a a more general sense. *Maniyam* derives from the Sanskrit word *manya,* which means honour and privilege. Many of the land grants to Brahmans were called *carvamaniyam,* meaning completely tax-free and honourable. However, the term *maniyam* was not reserved for Brahmans, as British categories which separated 'religious' from 'non-religious' grant implied. Indeed, in its least marked form *maniyam* was something used for *inams* in general. *Maniyam* was also used in a marked sense for land grants given to village servants whose task was to maintain and operate irrigation facilities, to village officers or headmen, to the *pujaris* or priests of small village temples or shrines, and to *inamdars* (holders of *inams)* who had such variable responsibilities as blowing the conch for a village festival or tending a flower garden which produced garlands for the village

deities. These *maniyams* reveal that royal grants sustained the entire structure of local village ritual.

Even small locality temples were linked to the king through the *inam*. These local temples organized the ritual systems of villages, often constituting some of its fundamental cultural coordinates as well: they demarcated boundaries, centres, the relationships of social groups within the village, defining and internally ranking lineages, sub-castes, and castes. Service to the temple was in many respects structurally equivalent to service to the village community, even as most village service *inams* specified services to both temples and the village, as suggested for Sri Lanka as well in the work of Hocart (1950: 44), who saw each village service group as a priesthood, and thus saw caste as an institution that was simultaneously political and religious.

In addition to many *inams* granted to village and local temples in the form of *maniyams* to local priests and village servants, many *inam* grants were also made to Brahmans, temples, and charities of various sorts. As is well known, the principal sources for south Indian historiography are epigraphical records of such grants, publicly proclaimed because of the merit which accrued to the donors from them and because of the centrality of these gifts to the ideology of kingship. One of the fundamental requirements of Indic kingship was that the king be a munificent provider of fertile lands for Brahmans who would study and chant the Vedas, perform sacrifices, and provide ritual services for the king so as to ensure and protect his prosperity and that of his kingdom; for temples which were the centres of worship and for festivals such as Dassara which renewed the sovereignty of the king and regenerated the kingdom; and for *cattirams (chatrams,* also called *choultries*, which were feeding, sometimes lodging, houses for pilgrims) which provided sustenance and shelter for itinerant Brahmans and pilgrims. The merit *(punyam*) of the king who made the grant could be shared by all those who protected the gift, a duty enjoined upon all subsequent kings. In spite of Pudukkottai's marginal social and political position, it was well endowed with temples and Brahmanic institutions precisely because of the prevailing force of royal ideology.

The underlying political base of any little kingdom in the old regime was its military capacity. This capacity was in turn based on structures of alliance and command, which were articulated by gifts, privileges, of varying kinds, and kinship. No little kingdom could survive if it did not have an efficient system of military mobilization. These systems were organized around subordinate chieftains, connubial connections, and privileged landholding rather than a centralized or bureaucratically organized system of revenue collection and military rule. Royal grants helped to sustain military organization as well as local village ritual and an impressive complex of larger temples and Brahmanic settlements. The political economy (by which I mean here the institution of kingship, the distribution of authority, and the nature and structure of resource allocation) was based on a logic of redistribution that penerated far and wide.

The gift of land without onerous burdens of taxation, the occa-sional participation in wars in which honour and booty could be won, and the organization of land and military rights in relations of ritual clientage to chiefly and kingly patrons resulted not only in a political system of great fluidity and dynamism, but one in which individuals could vie for relative distinction in a social system where honour was intimately tied up with rank through interpenetrating forms of political and ritual action. The valued constituents of sovereign authority were differentially and partially shared through the redistributive mechanisms of the gift. Service was offered as a way of entering this redistributive system. Kinship (a relatively open and inflected system) became the social base and expression of social and political relations. Honour—in particular the emblems and privileges that were given with each grant (itself a privilege), but also the honours in temples that were procured through worship and were ordered in relation to local and royal prerogatives—was both the mediation and the mechanism by and through which relations were established.

Thus I argue that the royal gift was basic to statecraft in all the kingdoms of the old order in southern India. All gifts were not the same; but they all shared one thing in common: they were given by the king. The substance of the gift (the land rights, titles, emblems, honours,

and privileges of service, usufruct, and command) was the partial sovereign substance of the king. Participation in the king's sovereignty was not, however, unranked, for the differential nature and contingent character of all these entitlements provided the basis for the creation of a political hierarchy. Ultimately, entitlements by their very nature constituted hierarchy through a logic of variable proximity to the king, to sovereignty itself. What Geertz has written about Bali is true of the old order in south India: 'The whole of the *negara* (court life, the traditions that organized it, the extractions that supported it, the privileges that accompanied it) was essentially directed toward defining what power was; and what power was what kings were' (Geertz 1980: 124).

My sense of the meaning of royal gifts was initially based not only on a reading of land records, which, though they gave histories of grants, revealed a thick infrastructure of gifting and suggested that land rights were necessarily conjoined with other rights to privilege, service, and honour, were themselves insufficiently explicit about the ideological content of the system to permit a full or satisfactory interpretation. Rather, I developed an understanding of kingly bene-ficence from textual sources that depicted the centrality of gifts and their various forms. Using eighteenth-century texts (genealogies, chro-nicles, ballads) as cultural discourses, I found persistent motifs, events, narrative forms, tropes, and images, and I read the parts they played in the poetics of power. I used this textualized discourse not only, as at first I thought was all I could do, to get a sense of how these Indians conceived their own past, but also to demarcate the key element of my subsequent inquiry, to create a historiographical frame for under-standing key structures, events, and their relations. I found that my textualized readings were indeed realized in historical processes. Thus I was able to identify and focus on the core conceptions of sovereignty; the interpenetrating transactions in gifts, service, and kinship; the structure and form of political hegemony. I was able to understand what had previously been obscured in the colonial writing on the little kings, or *poligars (palaiyakkarar):* that the adoption of Hindu forms of kingship by what were said to be low caste (later often defined as

criminal castes under British rule) chiefs was not just an ideological ruse but, rather, was reflected in the entire structure of the political system; that rights to landholding were political rights and reflected the structure of the little kingdom at the same time that they revealed the pervasive importance of royal honour; and that the states were not absolute failures because of their lack of emphasis on the bureaucratic demarcation of land rights and the collection of revenue, but successful, vital, and, to the British, highly threatening political systems because of the interplay of rights and privileges of land, service, kinship, honour, and local resources.

The Cultural Poetics of Power

But if kingship—and more generally the 'political'—was so important, how did it affect social relations in the little kingdom? Only after returning to Pudukkottai to do extensive fieldwork in 1981—2 was I able to find that the forms of clan and caste structures that the British had seen as organic growths from the Indian soil had in fact been vitally transformed by the political histories of local-level chiefs. First, through inquiries conducted in the field, I determined that the political hierarchy was also, with certain crucial exceptions, a social hierarchy. As I mentioned above, the Jagirdars were collateral chiefs, the Cervaikarars affinally connected warriors, the Kurikarars mostly Kallars but from sub-castes other than the royal sub-caste, and so on down the line. The Kallars themselves were, as Dumont also found for the Pramalai Kallar, territorially segmented, but in Pudukkottai the royal sub-caste occupied a uniquely important position, dominating all the other segments, or sub-castes. The internal organization of the royal sub-caste, markedly different from all other sub-castes, itself reflected a systematic if sometimes paradoxical inflection by political forces. And the settlement of Kallar chiefs, both great and small, throughout areas of non-Kallar settlement, as well as in the area inhabited by a large and often unruly Kallar sub-caste, effected both the ideological and instrumental dominance of royalty. These Kallars often had royal retainers under them, privileged rights to local lands, and the right to receive first honours on behalf of the Pudukkottai Raja in all village and

locality temples and festivals. The hierarchical force of royalty was expressed in many ways, not least through the comments of one of my principal informants, the titular head of the royal clan or *kuppam*. 'When we assumed our royal status *(antastu)',* this man told me, 'we became, as it were, a royal family. Hence, we, the five top lineages of the clan, began to have affinal relations only with royal families. So we became more elevated and dignified than the other groups and other clans. While the influence and glory of the Raja was high, the influence of those of us living in our group also went up accordingly. Others who do not have marriage ties with the five chiefs lineages also reside here but we classify them at a lower level.' All members of the royal sub-caste were loosely called *rajapantu,* meaning that they had a connection with the Raja. While this term was used to designate all members of the sub-caste in an unmarked sense, within the sub-caste itself there were multiple distinctions of rank, all of them, as it turned out, having to do with proximity to the king. In one particularly lucid discussion, my informant explained to me the logic of hierarchy in Pudukkottai.

> Why are we [meaning royal Kallars] superior? [He asked this rhetorically.] Because we maintain control and order *(kattupatu)* in our community. We do not allow widow remarriage and we abide by the moral codes of our society strictly. Other Kallars may say that all Kallars are the same. It is popularly assumed that all Kallars are thieves. But we are not thieves. How can the ruling Kallars steal from others? Our Kallars are pillars of the community, chiefs, village leaders, politicians, and nobles. We have to maintain law and order. How can we go off thieving? We decided that we should lead a life of order and restriction. Others are not like us. We live for honour and status. Our Kallars base our lives on the temple and on marriage relations. Only if the temple and the lineage are correct can we seek an alliance. Our honour is displayed in the palace and in temples. When honour is measured, in the same way the number of carats is measured in gold, will we like less dignified groups taking seats on a par with us? No, they are not fit to sit with us.

The pre-eminence of the royal sub-caste is thus explained not only through reference to the fact that the king hailed from this sub-caste, but by noting that this sub-caste has the most rigidly defined and maintained code of conduct of all sub-castes. These Kallars have the most order, and they enforced order through the set of restrictions which are implied by the term *kattupatu. Kattupatu,* which can be taken to mean code for conduct and discipline, literally means something more like restriction, or even constriction, deriving from the root *kattu,* meaning tied or knotted. The code for conduct includes rigidly defined kinship rules, some of which, like the Brahmanic prohibition of widow remarriage, mark the royal Kallars off from all other Kallars and suggest a kind of Sanskritization. Others involve working one's way through the myriad gradations of upper Kallar society by trading political, social, and cultural capital back and forth, often through affinal transactions. *Kattupatu* is a term that is used frequently by all Kallar sub-castes and indeed all Pudukkottai castes, though only among Kallars, and specifically within the royal sub-caste of Kallars, does it have the particular kind of inflection just described. For all these groups, though again most importantly for the royal sub-caste, *kattupatu* does not mean simply a code for conduct, but a set of authoritative procedures which renders this code enforceable within the community.

My informant's statements, and the general ideological orientation they reflect, reveal the continuation of concerns about the past reputation of Kallars as thieves, bandits, outlaws. The ethnographic discourse here shares much in common with the eighteenth-century family histories that I mentioned earlier. In these texts, as in the statements of Kallar informants, the acknowledged past becomes totally transformed by the attainment of kingship. Again, there is an implicit opposition between the representation of the activities of thieves and the activities of kings. In this case, the royal duty of protecting and subduing disorder is combined with an ideology of order and restriction which organizes and becomes the sub-text of the social relations of the sub-caste.

The very word Kallar means thief in Tamil, and no one, at least none of my informants, disputes the fact that at certain places and times

particular groups of Kallars engaged in predatory activity. In fact they constantly bring it up with a certain kind of relish, suggesting only partial embarrassment about their past. And as I and others have written elsewhere, this in itself is not necessarily a problem, since predation was often the principal means used to accumulate wealth by kings who were not so concerned about a regularized tax base as the British became when they began in the early nineteenth century to gain most of their profit from land revenue. In Pudukkottai, Kallars attained their position of royal authority in the first place by providing protection to local communities and institutions, and this is amply documented in inscriptions recording protection because of their capacity to control, and to a very large extent monopolize, the means of violence, and there is much in Indian tradition to suggest that the opposition of bandit and king is a complementary opposition. But it is, culturally speaking, an opposition: the violence of the bandit is illegitimate, and it represents and causes the disorder that the legitimate violence of the king must control. Kings are not only legitimate, they define the realm of the legitimate. And the way in which the royal sub-caste organizes its social relations makes it impossible that they could be thieves, or affected in any way by this general reputation. The royal sub-caste is headed by a king, and it provides almost all the royal nobles of the kingdom. The fundamental duty of these members of the elite is to subdue disorder, destroy lawlessness, and enforce law and order, both within the kingdom at large, and within the sub-caste itself. And of course, as kings, by virtue of defining what is orderly, they define disorder too.

But this is true in more than just the obvious, or for that matter the Foucaultian, sense, as I discovered when doing fieldwork with other caste groups. For most castes, there is a steady decrease of order as one goes down the caste hierarchy, in the sense defined by my Kallar informants and assimilated with only minimal dissent by many non-Kallar informants. Maravars, for example, who in all fundamental respects were like Kallars except for the crucial fact that they were not kings, had found it impossible to organize their social relations in the larger territorial units, the *natus*, that Kallars had, and the Maravars

lamented this loudly and frequently. Indeed, the Maravars themselves attributed this disorder not just to the broader decline and fall of the world in general, but more particularly to their loss of political control. For other groups, there was not only a noticeable decline in order, and a laxness in defining and maintaining the *kattupatu,* but also a decline in the autonomy to define what order was. Untouchable groups, for example, took the locality, and sometimes the lineage, names of their dominant caste patrons. Whereas other groups had traditional rights called *kaniyatci* to land, honour, etc., untouchables told me that for them *kaniyatci* only meant the right to serve their patrons. The fundamental structures of their social relations were inscribed by the hegemony of the dominant classes. Notions of honour, order, royalty, and command have been operationalized in the practices that produce and reproduce hierarchy. These practices (embedded as they are in cultural forms and historical processes) are themselves based on structures of power as well as on the hegemonic nature of cultural constructions of power.

If it be argued that my interpretation, though perhaps true for marginal regions like Pudukkottai, can hardly apply generally to south India, let alone to the subcontinent as a whole, I reply that it is precisely the marginality of Pudukkottai that makes it possible to detect the forces that were at work elsewhere. Because Pudukkottai was not brought under patrimonial control (neither that of the Islamic rulers in the south nor later that of the British), caste was never set completely loose from kingship. Many current theories of caste, particularly those emphasizing Brahmanic obsessions concerning purity and impurity, but also those aspects of ethnosociological theory that stress the proper and improper mixing of substances, are in large parts artificats of colonialism, referring to a situation in which the position of the king and the historical dynamic of royal power has been displaced, and sometimes destroyed. However much Dumont's theory is predicated on an a priori separation of what he describes as the domains of religion and politics, with the former encompassing the latter, he was also almost certainly influenced by an ethnographic reality in which kingship played only a very small, residual role. As for early

ethnosociological proposals about caste, Inden has himself recently noted that his early work is largely derived from texts which were generated only after the demise of kingship as a powerful cultural institution (Inden 1986). The texts, he now says, reflected new traditions which attempted to deal with the problem of regulating caste interaction in an environment in which there was no longer a king.

The Politics of Hierarchy

Politics, as we define it here, has both to do with the processes by which authority is constituted at each level of representation and with the linkages of the constituent groups in society to the king (usually through the authoritative figures who represent their social groups). Politics has a territorial dimension, but is not exhausted by territorial forms. In the royal sub-caste of Kallars in Pudukkottai, the intervention of the king changed and reconstructed (as well as decomposed) the internal order of the system, affecting both social and territorial forms. Even in other sub-castes, less directly influenced by kingship, social organization was only understandable within a framework which is fundamentally political, realized over time (i.e. in history).

It is my argument here that structures of power play a central role in the social organization of caste and kinship, that politics is fundamental to the process of hierarchization and the formation of units of identity. Dumont has great difficulty with the notion that kinship can be politicized. When he does see hierarchical tendencies develop in the domain of kinship, he blames them on the ideology of caste, which has to do not with politics but with purity and pollution. Dumont's elevation of alliance as the fundamental principle of south Indian kinship is in large part because alliance mitigates the asymmetrical effects of marriage relations through the generalized exchange of marriage partners within the endogamous group. Hierarchy creeps to the borders of the endogamous group, but only enters in the sense that it can bring about the creation of new endogamous subdivisions. Nonetheless, even though Dumont (1957, 1986) suggests the powerful role of political dominance in creating alliances and particular marriage patterns, he explains any such endogamous subdivisions by saying that

they arise through bastardy or the differential status of wives in a polygynous marriage. Dumont maintains that new endogamous groups develop within larger endogamous groups only because of the lower status attached to marriages with women from outside the proper alliance group.

Politics not only occupies a subordinate position in Dumont's general theory, but is eclipsed on the one side by the pre-eminence of kinship, invaded by social bastardy and caste hierarchy, and on the other by caste, which elevates the Brahman and attendant principles of purity and pollution, above the king. Caste, and the hierarchical principle it entails, is fundamental because it is religious, and in Indian social thought, according to Dumont, the religious encompasses the social, the economic, and the political.

Dumont therefore sees caste authority and political authority as fundamentally different. He writes that 'the notion of caste and of a superior caste exhausts all available transcendence. Properly speaking, a people's headman can only be someone of another caste. If the headman is one of their own, then to some degree they are all headmen' (Dumont 1986: 161). This is true in Pudukkottai in that headmen are at one level simply *primus inter pares* in their social group. However, by virtue of their connection to the king, they do also 'transcend' their own community. The king is himself simply a Kallar, and not the highest Kallar by his marriage or lineage. But by virtue of his connections to the entire kingdom—not caste transcendence—he is also the transcendent overlord.

Hierarchy in Pudukkottai concerns transcendence in the context of kingship, where the king is both a member of a segmentary lineage system and the overlord of the entire kingdom. What would seem contradictory to Dumont is the paradox upon which the entire caste system rests. Kinship is inflected, at its core, by politics; and politics is nothing more than the curious paradox of a king who transcends all, even as he is one of his own metonyms. In the social and political world of the little kingdom, this meant that the king was an overlord, but one who was nonetheless always embroiled in the strategic concerns of

kinship, status hierarchy, protection, and warfare, and in the maximization of his own honour and sovereign authority within the little kingdom and in a wider world of other kingdoms and greater overlords.

Part of Dumont's resistance to acknowledging the political inflection of caste and kinship may result from the political marginality of the Pramalai Kallars, a marginality rendering them far more similar to the unruly Vicenki Nattu Kallars who lived in the northwestern part of Pudukkottai state than to the royal sub-caste. With both the Pramalai Kallars and the Vicenki Nattu Kallars, the lack of well-developed affinal boundaries corresponding to discrete territorial units, as well as of a distinct sense of the hierarchy of groups, can perhaps be explained by their incomplete incorporation within (and therefore inflection by) the political system of a little kingdom. Everywhere in Tamil Nadu, the Kallars had highly developed notions of territory, but their sub-caste organization achieved its particular level of territorial segmentation and hierarchical articulation in Pudukkottai alone. And only within the royal sub-caste of Pudukkottai did Kallars develop the pronounced and complex forms of territorial bounding and hierarchical marking that they did, and which I describe in great detail elsewhere (1987). Kingship does make a difference.

Some of Dumont's theoretical problems stem from the fact that he does not pursue an interest in the ethnohistorical reconstruction of the Pramalai Kallars. He is aware of the modern decline of headmanship, and that it no longer expresses itself as fully as it might once have done in the social logic of Pramalai organization. Characteristically acute, he senses a correlation with recent political change: 'If authority rests on external sanction, it is to be expected that it cannot maintain itself without formal government recognition' (Dumont 1986: 159). Unfortunately, he does not consider the possibility that colonialism, and the attendant breakdown of the old regime, have much to do with the development of the separation of religion and politics which he has identified and reified into a timeless Indian social theory. A combination of theoretical programme, ethnographic 'accident', and

historical disinterest have conspired to render Dumont's understanding of the Kallars, however powerful, limited in fundamental ways.

Here and elsewhere I have argued that the social relations that made up Indian society, far from being 'essentialist' structures predicated on the transcendence of a set of religious principles, were permeated by 'political' inflections, meanings, and imperatives. Caste, as it is still portrayed in much current anthropological literature, is a colonial construction, reminiscent only in some ways of the social forms that preceded colonial intervention. The structural relations that made up the 'caste system' in Pudukkottai thus reflect—albeit with the distortions of ethnohistorical time—the ideological proposals of my informants. These ideological statements consistently referred to the historical means by and through which meaning was constructed and maintained. Caste, if ever it had an original form, was inscribed from the 'beginning' by the relations and conceits of power. And in medieval and early modern south India, it is clear that Geertz was indeed right: power was what kings were.

Ethnohistory and Ethnosociology

'We need history, but not the way a spoiled loafer in the garden of knowledge needs it.'—Nietzsche, Of the Use and Abuse of History

When I first began to use the term ethnohistory to describe the particular blend of history and anthropology that I sought to practise in my study of India, I thought that 'ethno' should do the same thing to history that it seemed to be doing to sociology. Of course the place was Chicago, the time the mid-1970s, and the word was culture. But even then, and despite the fact that in my work I sought to construct my sense of what it meant to do history in light of 'indigenous' historical texts, ethnohistory struggled against itself. Not only did ethnohistorians seem constantly to pose the question about epistemological mediation that began only rather later to problematize the original assumptions of ethnosociology (questions such as, how does an outsider attain access to or re-present a culturally specific form of knowledge?), but culture as a domain was much more difficult to lock up (or off) as a separate area

of inquiry. The injunction, 'Always historicize!', seemed always already there. But then as now, it was not always clear what the injunction meant (see Jameson 1981).

Originally, ethnohistory meant the reconstruction of the history of an area and people who had no written history. As such, it was used to denote in particular the field of studies concerning the past of American Indians, and secondarily of other so-called primitive or pre-literate societies. But, as many have since demonstrated, ethnohistory cannot be restricted to the unwritten or oral sources for history in most parts of the world where texts and written sources exist, even if they do not seem to penetrate some sectors of society. In India, as in many other places, there are no pure oral traditions: texts have provided the basis for tradition as often as the other way round. Indeed, both texts and traditions relate not only to each other, but also to historical processes of production and social forms of contextualization, interpretation, and certification. Ethnohistory in India is clearly not about the history of primitive or preliterate people.

As suggested above, ethnohistory is also not simply a gloss for a cultural analysis of historical sensibilities in India, whether embodied in texts or traditions. However, part of the task of ethnohistory is to contest the dominant voice of history, which in India has always been a Western voice. This voice has always disparaged India, insisting that the relative absence of chronological political narrative and the unsettling presence of myth and fancy are indicative of an under-developed sense of history. Ethnohistory can therefore assist in the project of recuperating a multiplicity of historical voices, revealing for India an active, vital, and integral historiographical industry. I have also argued that ethnohistory can help determine a culturally specific set of relevancies, moments, and narrative forms to expand and alter the sense of how to think about India's past. But this past is never contained solely within the texts or traditions that would be used for this task. If ethnohistory is used to situate history, it is always itself seen as situated in history (see also Dening 1980: 38).

Thus, the difficulties in anthropologizing history are not simply removed by the inverse call to historicize anthropology, for we never seem to reach explicit agreement about what history actually means. But if an investigation into the culture of history has both the strengths and the weaknesses of ethnosociology, an exploration of what is involved in the history of culture can assist in making a creative critique of culture theory, whether in ethnosociology or elsewhere. Not only has ethnosociology been insufficiently clear about the epistemological privilege it assumes in its claim to re-present indigenous forms of knowledge, it has excluded a wide range of historical questions, as also any consideration of the relations of knowledge and power beyond a restricted form of cultural analysis.

This is not the place, however, to summarize the arguments of Gramsci, Williams, Bakhtin, Bourdieu, Foucault, and other theorists who have helped specify and problematize the historicity of culture. It must suffice here to note that when culture is situated in history rather than opposed to it, the concept of culture inevitably unravels. I began by using culture as a method and conceit to privilege the discursive claims of my Kallar informants in relation to Dumont's proposals about the nature of hierarchy in India. That is to say, I began by participating in the ethnosociological claim that if you investigate native terms and meanings you will find that hierarchy is about x and not about y. However, the cultural statements of my informants subverted the autonomy of a presumed cultural domain, and in particular the opposition between the political/historical and the cultural/religious. At the same time, the injunction to historicize, vague though it sometimes seemed, enticed me to enter the web of power, knowledge, and history that constituted both the world of reference as well as the necessary conditions for contemporary cultural discourse. Culture, thus, was a conceit that deconstructed itself through its own historical reference, for culture distilled and displayed (and often displaced) the historical legacy of its own hegemonic ascendance.

The necessarily ambivalent position of history within any ethno-historical project provides critical access to much of the current theoretical debate about culture. But ethnohistory should not simply

disparage ethnosociology. For, in calling attention to the hegemony of Western social science, ethnosociology may both set some of the conditions for this kind of critique in Indian studies, and yet have the last laugh. The theoretical concerns about culture articulated here are as Western in their dominant figures and intellectual histories as the more positivist social science from which we tried to free ourselves in previous decades. However, if 'history' teaches us anything at all, it should at least help us dispose of the idea that culture can exist outside of history, however much this history—and I suspect any history—is always mediated through a multiplicity of cultural forms.

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3

Western 'Orientalists' and the Colonial Perception of Caste*

Susan Bayly

Introduction

This chapter examines the understandings of caste propounded by Western orientalists from the late seventeenth to the early twentieth century. It is important to explore these because so-called Western 'constructions' of caste had a considerable effect on Indian life, especially where such views were shaped by contributions from Indians themselves. Some at least of these ideas became embodied in the practices of government both during and after colonial rule, as well as being embraced, disputed, and reflected on by Indian poli-ticians, literati, and social reformers.

Often, though not invariably, so-called orientalists saw Hindus as the prisoners of an inflexibly hierarchical and Brahman-centred value system. Their insistence on this point played a significant part in the making of a more caste-conscious social order. Yet this could happen only in the context of broader political and social changes which were in progress well before the onset of colonial rule, as was seen in the preceding chapters. Furthermore, the continuing movement towards the castelike ways of life to be described in the book's final chapters

could not have occurred in so many areas without the active participation of Indians.

So while much of the subcontinent did become more pervasively caste-conscious under British rule, this is not to say that caste was in any simplistic sense a creation of colonial scholar-officials, or a misperception on the part of fantasizing Western commentators. Nor is it to say that the 'modernization' of India would somehow have taken a casteless or caste-denying form under a different kind of political order. It would therefore be wrong either to concentrate exclusively on 'orientalism' in exploring the meaning of caste under colonialism, or to deal with it from a strictly material or political perspective. Thus, before looking in Chapter 5 at the social and economic changes which helped to spread the norms of caste in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Chapters 3 and 4 will attempt to create a more nuanced intellectual history of both British and Indian conceptions of caste. The British side of this story is the focus of this chapter, with Indian theories and debates being explored in Chapter 4.

The Limited Power of Caste Reportage

As of the 1820s, British officials were deeply embroiled in the complex social and ideological changes which had initially exalted the warrior's caste codes, and had then given increasing prominence to those of the 'dharmic' Brahman and merchants. As a trading firm which had only just transformed itself into a fragile military despotism, the English East India Company was struggling to consolidate its new territorial possessions and to identify 'collaborators' in locales where even experienced officials were hard pressed to distinguish friend from foe. In these volatile circumstances, the acquisition of detailed social knowledge had become essential to the Company's operations. As in other parts of the Empire, both Britons and those whom they were trying to rule found advantage in feeding the still insecure colonial state with such data as could be used to tax and police its subjects.

For some modern historians, this quest for information was a 'hegemonic' exercise enabling Britons to divide and enfeeble the

peoples of the subcontinent by subjecting them to a demeaning and destructive process of 'essentialization'. Caste was certainly much referred to in the reportage which shaped both scholarship and official policy in the nineteenth century, that is, in the publications of jurists, missionaries, revenue surveyors, military recruiters, and innumerable other observers of Indian life. Indeed, the increasingly powerful and intrusive colonial regime that came into being after the 1857 Mutiny-Rebellion found more and more reasons to count and classify the subcontinent's peoples, and to call on Indians to report themselves as members of specific social, economic, and occupational categories, each supposedly possessing its own 'essences' and qualities. Particular importance has been attached to the operations of the all-India decennial Census, which was launched in 1871; in its voluminous reports and statistical tables, Indians were counted, ranked, and classified by caste, 'tribe', and enthnoreligious 'community'. By the early twentieth century, the massive bureaucratic machinery of the Raj had generated an enormous output of further documentation in which jati and varna were used as basic units of identification.

Two key themes have been identified in this vast array of regional ethnographic surveys, population censuses, and other official and quasi-official writing. The first of these is an insistence on the supposedly ineradicable sense of community dividing Hindus from Muslims and other non-Hindus; the second is a view of Indians (apart from so-called tribals and followers of minority faiths) as slaves to rigid, Brahman-centred caste values. This is what Ronald Inden has called the 'imagined India' of false and dehumanizing orientalist stereotypes. Historians of the so-called Subaltern school have seen these misperceptions and wilful distortions as having passed unchallenged from self-serving colonial reportage into the pronouncements of India's post-Independence ruling class.

Yet the writings of nineteenth-century travellers, missionaries, and scholar-officials were far too diverse and contradictory to be portrayed in such one-dimensional terms, regardless of period, and without allowing for important variations in approach and interpretation. The colonial state was certainly hungry for statistical and ethnographic data.

And, like the many Christian missionaries who engaged in orientalist reportage, colonial officers regularly used phrasing which offends the modern ear:

> . . . the Hindoo is mild and timid, rather disposed to melancholy, and effeminate pleasures.
>
> The life of the Rajput in British districts is not calculated to develop the manly virtues . . . they have lost the taste for manly exercises which harden the muscles and develop the physique.
>
> The Arora is the trader 'par excellence' (of southwestern Punjab) . . . (They) are of inferior physique . . . 'a cowardly secretive, acquisitive race . . . possessed of few manly qualities . . .'
>
> All Bowries [also known to colonial ethnographers as Badhiks or Bhudduks, a 'vagrant' or 'gyspy' caste] have been from ages past and are still by profession inveterate and irreclaimable robbers.

Such pronouncements have been seen as evidence of an orientalist 'project' to deny the existence of civil society in India. By representing the subcontinent as a domain of slavish allegiances, orientalists purportedly fed officialdom with the idea that it was 'scientific' to treat Indians as unvirile, irrational, and socially atomized, thus unfit to govern themselves.[*] Yet these writings contained ambiguities and contradictions. The more sophisticated conveyed real uncertainty about whether ties of caste and ethnoreligious community were indeed paramount for all Indians. Among those who did emphasize its power, some at least saw caste as relatively modern in origin rather than an eternal essence of Indian culture. There was even debate about whether caste was indeed corrupting and destabilizing, or an essentially benign and moral system which could be used for desirable ends.

So how did the most influential Western commentators perceive the ideologies of caste, and how much significance did they attach to their manifestations in Indian life? There are two points to bear in mind here. First, the importance which these analysts ascribed to caste cannot be explored in isolation, or in an exclusively Indian or colonial framework. On the contrary, their writings about caste need to be considered

against the background of wider intellectual debates involving attempts by Western thinkers to address the pressing social and political questions of their time. And secondly, within India itself, the analysis of caste must be related to debates about other aspects of south Asian polity and social order, some of which, notably race and religion, came to acquire equal or greater prominence in so-called orientalist discourse.

It is true that, from the early nineteenth century, scholar-officials were turning increasingly to literate Brahmans and to the Brahmanized scribal and commercial populations who were coming into prominence across India. These groups were particularly sought after as learned informants and as providers of the sastric texts which the Company's officers were coming to treat as authoritative sources on 'native' law and custom. Some of these were the same superior literate specialists described [earlier; in Susan Bayly's book]. Such people's concern to retain the preferment they had achieved under previous regimes gave many of them an incentive to tell the colonial state that India was a land of age-old Brahmanical values, and that its inhabitants could be most effectively controlled by feeding their supposed reverence for hierarchical jati and varna principles.

In some cases it clearly suited both the British authorities and their informants to disseminate a picture of Indian life which disregarded its instances of comparative openness and intellectual dynamism, and emphasized instead those conventions of caste and 'community' which made it appear static and rigidly Brahman-centred. David Washbrook has proposed this for the early colonial south, arguing that in the early nineteenth century Tamilnad's newly vulnerable landed elites found advantage in playing up claims of superior varna and jati origins in their dealings with the colonial judiciary. Both colonial judges and revenue officials had apparently come to see the use of prestigious Brahman and Vellala caste titles as evidence of authentically lordly origins, even though they were also aware that families of comparatively humble birth had acquired rights and property under the region's recently conquered warrior dynasts.

These Madras officials did not see such instances of social mobility as signs of healthy Western-style individualism. On the contrary, they were worried about stability in what they saw as a dangerously volatile region, and believed that the country should be governed in alliance with its 'natural aristocracy'. Thus these superior Tamil landowners quickly found that British judges were more likely to abrogate their privileged revenue rights if these were represented as having been acquired in the recent past by known historic acts of purchase or endowment. It appears then that they learned to tell the courts that they should be allowed to keep their holdings simply because they were Brahmans or ancient Vellala lords of the land. In other words, these were Indians who probably had a perfectly clear idea about where their landholding rights had come from. Yet, in flat contradiction of the colonial state's pronouncements about the superiority of its individualistic legal and political principles, they learned at this time that it paid to behave like ahistorical 'orientals' who believed in age- old corporate statuses and divinely mandated tradition, rather than individualistic principles of achievement and personal gain.

For other regions too it has been argued that India came to look like a traditional caste society because the British perceived and made it so. Put in these stark terms, this idea of caste as a colonial 'invention' is unpersuasive. The Tamil *mirasidar* landlords referred to above would certainly have wished the wider world to see them as Vellalas or Brahmans, whatever the Madras judges did or thought; British colonial perceptions merely added a further dimension to these concerns. Elsewhere too, jati and varna norms had certainly become increasingly pervasive in earlier centuries even if they were not universally subscribed to at the time of the colonial conquest. Furthermore, this view oversimplifies 'colonial' thinking, particularly regarding Brahmans. Even in the later nineteenth century, when the colonial state's strategies of information-gathering became more specialized and elaborate, supposedly reflecting standards of exactitude unknown to non-Europeans, British writers were not interested in caste to the exclusion of other features of Indian life. Most were uncertain about how to obtain and interpret the knowledge they sought, and did not see

their findings as proof that the whole of India subscribed to a single ideology of hierarchical caste values.

Many nineteenth-century orientalists saw both priestly and secular Brahmans as an important but also pernicious force in the society, and were far from credulous about the reliability of the *pandits* and other literate specialists who informed them. And, far from defining all of Hindu India as a Brahman-revering caste society, Western writers regularly noted the prominence of anti-Brahmanical monk- renouncers in the areas they observed, as well as the conspicuousness of distinctly un-Brahmanized peoples and ways of life in many regions. Furthermore, many officials commented on the conflicting views expressed by their various would-be informants, recognizing particularly that Hindu and Muslim notables were often bitterly at odds in their attempts to represent regional ethnographic facts and 'traditions' to their new colonial patrons.

In reality then, British rule generated a remarkable quantity of statistical and analytical documentation in which references to caste featured very prominently, but did not create an all-powerful 'colonial' consensus about this or any other aspect of the society. Anyone moving from revenue records to judicial codes, local censuses, and the descriptive writings of soldiers, missionaries, and other quasiofficial observers could meet the same people being represented and 'essentialized' in all sorts of guises, depending on what the commentators in a given region understood by such terms as caste, tribe, race, sect, nationality, religious community, and occupation, or by the multitude of vernacular terms that were used as their rough equivalents.

This diversity remained in evidence even after mid-century when the comparatively uncoordinated efforts of earlier regional data- gatherers began to be supplanted by the launching of a whole host of mammoth all-India data surveys. These include the first series of Indian district *Gazetteers* (1869), the decennial all-India Census (from 1871), the provincial statistical reports (e.g. the twenty-volume *Statistical Account of Bengal,* 1875—7), the encyclopaedic *Tribes and Castes* surveys (from

1891), and all the other exercises in centralized enumeration and reportage which became the hallmarks of the Victorian Raj. For all their flaws and 'orientalist' bias, these works are worth taking seriously, not least because so many Indians found it useful to adapt their terms and concepts for their own purposes. This was particularly so from the later nineteenth century, when complex changes in the so-called public culture of the Raj led many politically active men to try to extend their regional prestige and influence by founding the 'modernizing' voluntary organizations which came to be known as caste associations and caste reform movements.

The Diversity of Orientalism and the Complexity of the 'Other'

The pronouncement of sweeping generalities about other people's 'essences' was not an invention of white men, or of the colonial state. For many centuries before the British conquest, Indians had been meeting outsiders who saw them as alien and exotic. In the eleventh century AD, the Arab traveller al-Biruni described Indian society in language which in some senses prefigured the writings of the 'essentializing' Victorian race theorists. Stressing India's 'exclusive attitudes' and 'laws of purity', al-Biruni declared, 'The Hindus believe that there is no country but theirs, no nation like theirs, no kings like theirs, no religion like theirs, no science like theirs. They are haughty, foolishly vain, self-conceited and stolid.'

In later centuries Muslim writers still knew India as a land of varnas and jatis: 'Binavali is the son of Hiraman, a Kayastha. The Kayasthas are a tribe of the fourth case [*sic*] which Brahman has created . . .' Mughal commentators, too, made much of the moral and physical essences which supposedly distinguished different Indian populations, disparaging the 'wild', black, dangerous Bhils and 'predatory' Kolis, and expressing qualified approval for others, as in the *Ain-i-Akbari's* account of the Gujarat pastoralists whom the Mughals knew as Ahirs: 'Cunning but hospitable, they will eat the food of the people of every caste, and are a handsome race.' It was the Mughals who developed the technique

of grading Indians by skin colour so that officials could record standardized descriptions of criminals, rebels, and other troublemakers. This system, which classifies people as being of fair, 'wheaten' (medium), or dark complexion, passed straight into colonial police practice; it was retained even after the adoption of finger-printing, and remained in use well into the post-Independence period.

Thus the British were certainly not India's first data-hungry rulers. Much that was done in the nineteenth century to classify and aggregate Indians for official purposes was in line with the practices of earlier statecraft. In the sixteenth century, the Telugu-speaking migrant warriors who called themselves Nayakas were able to impose heightened forms of centralized tribute-taking on the realms they founded in the southern Tamil country. As commercial networks expanded in these areas, the Nayakas found that relatively tight jati affinities were developing among the more specialized occupational groups. This kind of cohesion was probably already in existence in certain parts of both north and south India, among many urban artisans, fishermen, ritualists, and specialized pollution-removers such as barbers and washerman. The Nayakas were therefore among the many expansive rulers who treated such groups as collective entities for the purposes of revenue collection. The earliest British revenue surveys and population censuses used techniques and categories which were borrowed directly from these rulers and their successors, as in the case of the *dehazada* surveys which were village-by-village compilations of the size, assets, and revenue liabilities of a given region's ethnic and occupational communities.

These changes in economic and political power gave rise to the phenomenon of so-called caste headmanship, or at least gave greater definition to the guild-like forms of organization and leadership which had apparently been common among traders and artisans in earlier centuries. Among merchants and other specialized populations in these warrior-ruled realms, certain individuals or lineages either had or were acquiring an exalted status as arbiters of craft or commercial standards, and seem to have been distinguished in ritual terms as well. These were the people whom the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Nayaka lords

were inclined to honour as chief notables or *talaivans,* vesting them with the authority of so-called caste headmanship in their home locales, and making them liable for the collection of cash revenue dues from the members of their particular community. Their equivalents in north India were the notables known as *chaudhuris* who were given similar duties and honours under the Mughals and their successors. The East India Company ran its coastal enclaves in collaboration with these people. Generations later there were still ethnographers and census enumerators who took the view that castes in general, or at least many non-agrarian castes, were self-regulating corporations which deferred to the authority of caste headmen and councils or*panchayats* of caste 'elders'.

Why and how did Europeans start to use the term caste? The word's origins are usually said to be Iberian. In the sixteenth century the term *casta* (apparently derived from the Latin *castus,* chaste) was used in Portuguese and Spanish to mean species or breed in both botany and animal husbandry; it seems though to correspond to the English word cast or caste which had the same meaning and apparently predates the British connections with India. *Casta* came to be used in the Iberian New World colonies to refer to Amerindian clans and lineages. Since its botanical and zoological uses involved the concept of pure or true strains and breeds, in the Americas it also came to be applied by bloodline-conscious Iberian settlers to people of mixed white and non-white descent. In India *casta* was used by early European travellers as an ambiguous term for community, blood-line, or birth-group. It appears in sixteenth-century Portuguese sources both as a term for religious denomination, that is, the difference between 'Moor' (Muslim) and Hindu (or 'Gentoo'), as well as what we would now understand as jati and varna.

By the mid-seventeenth century, Dutch and English writing on India had adopted these usages from the Portuguese, employing them with equal ambiguity and in conjunction with other imprecise terms including race, class, nation, sect, and tribe. In the maritime trading ports, early travellers and officials met forms of social organization which were apparently much influenced by Brahmanical conventions.

This probably reflects the fact that the artisans and mobile commercial people with whom the East India Companies were involved in this period were finding ritual and practical advantage in embracing these 'traditional' caste forms. Describing life in the commercial port of Surat in 1689, the English traveller Ovington reports: Among the Bannians [*banias*: commercial caste groups] are reckoned 24 castes *[sic],* or Sects, who both refrain from an indiscriminate mixture in Marriages, and from eating together in common.'

This account is couched in virtually the same language that was in use 200 years later in 'essentializing' colonial pronouncements about the 'effete' and 'unmanly' qualities of India's so-called 'non-martial races'. Ovington insists too that people in a caste society are politically unfree, that caste is both a 'despotic' and an emasculating institution and a tool of 'tyrants'. Thus the 'innocent and obsequious' *banias* have a 'Horror of Blood', says Ovington, they are subjects of a 'Despotick Government [which] breaks their Spirits . . .'; this combines with the torrid climate to 'weaken and effeminate their constitutions . . .' His account also stresses the conventions of strict ritual avoidance which he claims to have observed among the Surat *bania* groups, particularly their employment of pollution-removers ('Halalchors'), 'separated from all the rest of the Casts, as a thing Unclean'.

Ovington's remarks obviously prefigure many of the so-called essentializing themes of later 'orientalist' scholarship. Yet they were produced almost a century before Britain's move from trade to dominion in Asia, and in an intellectual and political milieu with little or no resemblance to the England of high Victorian muscular Christianity and imperial cults of manliness. He and the other early Company chroniclers who commented on the supposed 'unmanliness' and political slavishness of Indians were far from being representatives of a 'hegemonic' colonial power, and it is therefore important to place these views and judgements in their contemporary intellectual context. In Ovington's day English social commentators saw 'despotism' as a European evil. In the Protestant political theory of the time, it was the Church of Rome and the absolutist monarchies of Europe which imposed tyrannical despotism on freeborn Christians, deforming their

characters and making them 'womanish' and slavelike. In the travel writing of this period, current debates about polity, despotism, and the English constitution were regularly transposed to the Indian setting. This certainly provided later memorialists with ideas that were applied to the circumstances of full-scale empire, but in their own time they cannot be seen as tools being fashioned for explicitly colonial purposes.

By the early eighteenth century, the European commercial enclaves were places where local conditions of trade and social organization gave foreign commentators very diverse experiences of caste. In the south, representatives of the European trading companies were struck by what they understood to be a deep and contentious division between castes of the so-called left-hand and right-hand *(idangai* and *valangai)*. European traders and officials found themselves being drawn into violent conflicts between bodies of artisans, traders, and affiliated labouring people who had come to group themselves into these paired multi-jati alliances. These confrontations took the form of battles over deceptively trivial matters of ceremonial rank or temple 'honours'. In Madras and other European trading centres, representatives of the European companies reported at length on these conflicts, often compiling extensive listings of the rights and 'honours' which their adjudicators had conferred on particular groups of their contending 'right'- or 'left'-hand clients and litigants.

This left-right ideology was apparently unknown outside the Telugu and Tamil country, and it had virtually disappeared as a focus for so-called honours disputes by the mid-nineteenth century. It seems to have originated in the fluid commercial milieux of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Nayaka domains, as a response to changing opportunities for both the local specialist groups who dominated the left-hand groupings, and the long-distance migrant traders who called themselves 'people of the right hand'. European trading operations undoubtedly contributed to the flow of assets which the contending parties were fighting over, and which they were able to translate back and forth into gains and losses in the ritual sphere. But while the involvement of British and other Western adjudicators clearly made a significant difference to some of these disputes, Europeans can hardly

be said to have invented any of this, or to have used their law-codes and ethnographies to try to perpetuate it as a 'divide and rule' tactic of the Raj.

Caste and the Individual in Company-Era Reportage, 1790—1860

The late eighteenth century saw the production of the first Indian gazetteers in English, these being digests of reportage on topography, economic life, and the physical environment, together with accounts of certain regions' political and social landscape. These volumes were partly modelled on the great encyclopaedic Mughal surveys, especially the *Ain-i-Akbari.* At the same time they were part of the ever-growing British and European drive to subject all known phenomena of the human and natural world to the gaze of the fact-seeking explorer, naturalist, and investigative scientist. The growth of empire was closely linked to these activities, though again it would be wrong to reduce all aspects of this period's pre-Rebellion, map-making, specimen-collecting, and ethnographic writing to an assertion of colonial relationships.

The compilers of the early Anglophone gazetteers certainly did not see all Indians as being equally 'Brahmanized' or castelike in the modern sense. Most used the terms caste, tribe, sect, and nation interchangeably; such usages often signalled no more than that the groups being described possessed some bond of affinity in the writer's eyes, often of a dangerously conspiratorial or 'criminal' nature, and frequently underpinned by ritualistic or occult attachments. Some of these 'tribes' or 'sects' were clearly thought of by early Western commentators as being part of a ranked Brahmanical order of castes. Others definitely were not, and there is often very little emphasis on rules of food avoidance or other aspects of ritualized purity and pollution concepts in these discussions of caste. It is often unclear in these accounts whether the ties that are held to unite such armed 'predator' peoples as 'Kolis' and 'Bhuddicks' are to be understood as permanent, inherited identities such as we would now associate with

jati and varna. Many of the warlike groups which particularly concern these authors were apparently regarded as Pindari-like 'gangs' formed by voluntary self-recruitment, though these were clearly thought to be capable of becoming permanent hereditary attachments over time.

Thus, what these early orientalists saw as caste implied a dangerous capacity for strong and dynamic people from India's 'lawless' regions to form menacing 'combinations' and conspiratorial alliances with one another at will. This is not a picture of passive or 'effeminated' slaves of Brahmanical tradition, even though Brahmanical principles are sometimes thought of as reinforcing such ties and statuses. In Kathiawar, says Walter Hamilton, author of the *East-India Gazetteer* (first published 1815), the 'Castes' (Kallar-like upland arms-bear- ers from Kathiawar) and 'many other tribes calling themselves Hindoos' have only 'very slender' claims to be considered 'within the Brahmanical pale'; their tenets 'with respect to purity and impurity [are] by no means rigid . . .'

This was the era of the Company's confrontation with the many hinterland realms and peoples whose unsettled ways and complex layered schemes of political authority were seen by its officials as a danger and challenge to the new regime's shaky sovereignty. Not surprisingly then, the key theme of this period's ethnographic writing was order and polity. The picture of 'caste' that emerges in these sources is very different from the accounts of seventeenth-century commercial enclaves like Surat, and makes much more of individual will and conspiratorial 'intrigue' than it does of established orders of rank and precedence.

As was seen, when the power and status of Brahmans were dis-cussed in the early stages of the Company's political expansion, there was a strong emphasis on the lessons to be learned from the allegedly oppressive, unnatural, and corrupting experience of 'Brahman' government in the Maratha country. Evangelical Protestant missionaries took up this theme of Brahman tyranny as a means of attacking Sir William Jones and the other eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century scholar-officials who had ascribed 'purity' and

'sublimity' to ancient Hinduism. The influential four-volume polemic by the Rev. William Ward (publ. 1817—20) characterized Hindu faith as a 'fabric of superstitions' concocted by Brahmans, 'the most complete system of absolute oppression that perhaps ever existed'.

Christian polemics like Ward's were clearly a major if unacknowledged source for later academic theorists, including those modern anthropologists who came to regard the Brahman as arbiter and moral centre of the Hindu social order. Ward actually anticipates Dumont's position on the radical subordination or encompassment of kingly power by Brahmanical authority: the 'Hindoo system', he says, is 'wholly the work of bramhuns *[sic]* ' who had 'placed themselves above kings in honour, and laid the whole nation prostrate at their feet'. This vision of immoral Brahman despotism clearly drew on popular English Protestant mythology of a priest-ridden, tyrannized papist Europe awaiting liberation by the triumph of the Reformation spirit. Beneficent British rule, said Ward, had already been inducing some 'degraded' lower-caste Hindus to throw off their 'brahmanical fetters' [sic]. Thus, like the debunkers of Maratha 'Brahman government', the arguments of Ward and his fellow early evangelicals focused on so-called Brahmanism as a corruption of free will: 'Like all other attempts to cramp the human intellect, and forcibly to restrain men within bounds which nature scorns to keep, this system [varna] . . . has operated like the Chinese national shoe, it has rendered the whole nation cripples.'

Non-missionary ethnographers in this period echoed some of these themes when they told their readers about armed raiders, predators, and lawless 'tribes' whose ways had become inherently 'thievish' and 'refractory' in the Brahman-ruled domains of the Marathas. In this respect, Walter Hamilton's *Gazetteer* of 1828 is a far cry from the ostensibly confident overviews of a settled and safely domesticated India that emerge from the *Imperial Gazetteers* and other works of late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century official scholarship. His approach is 'scientific' and often negative in tone, but unlike the missionaries, Hamilton's work does not characterize caste Hindu in general as submissive, slavish, or 'effeminated'.

Wherever Hamilton goes he finds what he calls castes and sects whose nature he sees as having been collectively depraved by a combination of corrupting political and environmental forces. In the Agra region, he reports that the area's 'peculiar political relations' had engendered a 'backward' state of agriculture, and that the territory was inhabited by 'tribes long noted for their habits of rapine, such as the Mewatties and Buddicks . . .' The feudatories of the Gaekwar's domains are 'predatory and piratical states'; the swamps, jungles, and mountains south of the former Maratha dynastic capital at Baroda had been, until recent times, the haunt of 'many tribes of professed thieves, who preyed on each other and on the civilized districts . . .' In Kathiawar, armed 'gracia' tribute-takers were still enlisting 'banditti of every caste and country'. This, he said, was an area abounding in 'thieves' and 'criminals' from the plains. These people were able to assimilate themselves more or less at will into existing 'predator' populations of 'Grassias, Catties, Coolies, Bheels, and Mewassies'. All these are a danger to order and good government, he says, but '[of] all the plunderers who formerly infested and still, but in less degree, infest Gujerat, the most bloody and untameable are the Collies [Kolis] . . .'

Bengal too, according to Hamilton, was a land where 'dacoits and gang robbers' were still 'prominent'. In Hamilton's view, such propensities were to be ascribed 'to a general absence of the moral principle which applies to the Mahomedans as well as to the Hindoos . . .' But unlike the evangelical Christians whose views became more widespread by mid-century, Hamilton did not portray either Hinduism or Islam as inherently immoral or corrupting. He does not call for mass conversion to Christianity, merely for 'exemplary punishments' and good laws. 'The great mass of Bengalese are certainly not constitutionally brutal or inexorable . . .', he says. Indeed, Hamilton insists, 'The genuine natives of this province never were a martial race, or disposed to a military life, for which, indeed, their want of personal strength and constitution almost incapacitates them . . .'

It is striking then that in this era when the three Presidency armies had become the basis of the Company's new political ascendancy, the distinction between so-called martial and non-martial races was

already being made in colonial writing, some fifty years before the concept was built into the formal recruitment policies of the Indian Army. Yet the context here is not so much assertive 'hegemony' as anxiety about the Company's uneven conquests and fragile political powers. These arguments obviously reflected the practical and strategic concerns of British soldiers and revenue officials. At the same time, they do not indicate that Hamilton and his contemporaries saw India as a unique society where the prevalence of inflexible caste ideas made Indians radically unlike the peoples of the West. On the contrary, his arguments, like those of this period's other influential orientalists, had as their intellectual source the writings of those thinkers, best exemplified by the social theorists of the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment, who were concerned to define the conditions under which the human character could attain the highest state of civilized virtue. This was equated with the formation of an ordered and beneficent polity in which rights and liberties were preserved, commerce, property and inheritance secured, and despotic power held at bay.

One of the great themes of these Scottish Enlightenment commentators was the importance of physical environment in the shaping of 'civilized' political institutions. Hamilton and his contemporaries were strongly influenced by this intellectual tradition, as can be seen in their reports on the dangers they perceived in zones of undomesticated Indian hill and jungle terrain, and on the moral and physical contrasts between the people they thought of as freedom-loving martial uplanders and feeble or non-'martial' lowlanders.

By the mid-nineteenth century, these preoccupations with polity and environmental typologies were being subsumed into debates about the moral and political meanings of race. But for all its relevance to the Company's strategic problems, and its obvious prefiguring of later orientalist themes, this remained a very incoherent body of so-called colonial knowledge. The understanding of caste that prevailed in the earlier nineteenth century was far from being the core of anyone's ideas about how to govern or tax the peoples of the subcontinent. Few if any of the early orientalists were concerned to instruct British officials in

the running or indeed the fabrication of a colonial 'caste society'. On the contrary, the principal concerns of these writings were largely outside the world of empire, with the same interest in the mapping of human essences being displayed in an enormous range of early- and mid-nineteenth-century works which had little or nothing to do with the governance of colonial subjects.

In particular, the European travel writings of such radical political commentators as Richard Cobden (1804-65) are full of references to the evils of misgovernment, and the thievish races, martial tribes, and lawless *banditti* who thrive in lax or tyrannical realms. But the so-called races and tribes being anatomized in these accounts are to be found in eastern and southern Europe and the Ottoman lands; few if any connections are made with the strategies of extra-European colonialism. Even in the case of data-collection within the Asian empire itself, until well into the nineteenth century what Europeans thought they understood about India was a product of piecemeal and very disparate forms of knowledge-gathering. The far-reaching linguistic discoveries ofWilliam Jones and his contemporaries actually emphasized cultural and historic kinship between the cultures of Europe and south Asia, rather than the superiority of whites over all non-white peoples. In his essays for *Asiatick Researches* and other learned 'orientalist' journals, Jones astounded the learned world with his revelation that India's Sanskrit-derived languages were of the same Aryan or Indo-European root stock as those of Europe.

Jones treated the Vedic texts which he studied and translated as an historic record of the coming of Brahmanical religion to India. His writings about this material gave rise to the powerful and far-reaching myth of an ancient invasion of the subcontinent by 'tribes' of the so-called Aryan race. Jones saw these primordial Aryans as heroes of a great adventure of migration and conquest 'at the earliest dawn of history', bringing with them from their west Asian homeland the teachings of a divine law-giver, Manu. It was the teachings of this 'pure' and 'primeval' religion which introduced the fourfold varna scheme into India, Jones wrote. The mythical Manu was India's primordial legislator; it was he who had 'divided the people into four orders . . . to

which he assigned names unquestionably the same in their origin as those applied to the four primary classes of the Hindus . . .' Linguistic kinship thus proved the historic 'racial' kinship of those who came to be identified with this legacy of shared Aryan or Indo-European migration, religion, and political culture, both in Europe and in Asia.

James Forbes, author of *Oriental Memoirs* (1813), built on Jones's claim that a linguistically defined race or nation of Aryans from west Asia had implanted in India the divinely sanctioned principles of the varna scheme. Forbes proposed further subdivisions into eighty-four 'classes or castes', each separated by rigid laws of endogamy, and each therefore differing from the other in 'features, dress and appearance, as much as if they were of different nations'. Like other early orientalists, Forbes was an environmental determinist who believed that there were profound moral and intellectual differences between those 'castes' or 'tribes' who inhabited bracing temperate climates and those who resided in the subcontinent's hot and 'debilitating' tropical zones. He regarded the inhabitants of rugged Rajasthan as the ultimate specimens of environmentally shaped nobility, 'a noble race of Hindoos, divided into distinct tribes'. The Rajput's homeland evokes a comparison with Switzerland, that favoured milieu of the European Romantics: 'Like that once free and happy country [Switzerland]', Rajasthan 'may be considered, more than any other oriental region, the nurse of liberty and independence.'

Forbes shared his contemporaries' widely held distrust of those 'castes' which he regarded as being of inherently 'gypsy-like', 'degenerate' and 'theivish' character. In this form, Forbes too sees the Indian propensity to form 'conspiratorial' corporate units as a potential danger to legitimate order and civilization. It is significant here that, like many later orientalists, Forbes treats ascetic corporations (sectarian *sanyasi* orders or bodies of 'fakirs') as castes, as in his reference to 'fakeers, or yogees, of the Senassee [sanyasi] tribe'. He also saw the Bengal region as a morally enfeebling environment, portraying its inhabitants as a perniciously Brahmanized people imbued with deeply rooted prejudices and attachments to *caste*' (his italics).

For many other Western writers in this period, Malabar, lowland Bengal, and other 'torrid' locales were regions where significant numbers of people did display a strict and 'unhealthy' concern with concepts of ritualized rank and purity. Yet, for all this insistence on the reality and perniciousness of certain forms or manifestations of 'caste', these publications did not stereotype all Indians as slavish Brahman-lovers to whom reason, individualism, and the claims of higher moral allegiances were unknown. In the 1820s and 1830s, at a time when the Company's frail regime was facing declining profits and widespread military challenges on its frontiers, the readers of these same orientalist journals could follow the debates about law, crime, and punishment that were engaging judicial and revenue officers in both India and Ceylon. These included many contributions which were said to be by 'native judges' and other educated Asians. They arose from exercises like the surveys of 'native opinion' undertaken in 1806 and 1808 in Ceylon and south India to determine whether a system of trial by multi-caste jury should be adopted in the Company's law-courts.

Far from reaching predictably 'orientalist' conclusions on this topic, these jurists did not argue that the 'native' mind was too caste-bound to embrace the individualist and egalitarian principles which they saw as inherent in the British jury system. Indeed, as far as criminal law was concerned, they argued that in this respect Asians were no different from Europeans. Regardless of faith or environment, it was 'elevating' to 'moral and political character' to possess the right to be a juror, and to be tried by a jury of one's own 'countrymen'. An important essay published in 1836 in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* gave prominence to the views of an influential 'native' judicial officer who argued that the members of all 'respectable' castes were indeed capable of exercising individual judgement in legal cases. This capacity for rational and individualistic thought was said to be found even among Shudras ('peasants' of so-called 'clean' castes), whose faculties had supposedly become 'enlightened' since the days of the ancient Brahmanical texts. There is the implication, however, that 'aboriginals' and untouchables were too 'unenlightened' for the mental and moral demands of jury service. What was being expressed here was thus an

early formulation of the idea that it was natural for Indians to be ordered by jati and varna, and that this was compatible with good order so long as these caste affinities did not become 'deformed' or excessively Brahman-centred.

Even in the treatment of colonial India's most celebrated display of 'orientalism'—the supposed discovery and suppression of the Thug or *thuggee* cult—the learned publications reach surprising conclusions in regard to caste. In the 1830s the great theme in these highly coloured accounts of fanatical goddess-worshipping strangers who supposedly waylaid travellers and murdered them for profit was that of polity deformed. The writers who claimed expertise on this topic insisted that no such horrors could have flourished in apparently safe and tranquil territories if the Company had not inherited the inadequacies of 'weak native governments' whose corrupt notables had long been in league with the Thugs, protecting the strangler 'gangs' from the laws of the Company and its client states, and sharing the spoils of their 'depredations'.

It is notable that for at least twenty years before the mass trials and 'reformist' legislation of the 1830s, the learned journals had carried reports of occult conspiracies, dangerous criminal 'vagrants', and secret sects of 'hereditary murderers and plunderers' in a variety of Indian regions. What was new in the late 1820s and 1830s was that the famous William Sleeman and his fellow Thug-finders were believed when they assimilated reports of what were probably many different forms of organized and unorganized violence into their vision of a single pan-Indian network of religiously informed 'atrocities'. These accounts certainly made much of the contrast between the rational white man and the fiendishly depraved 'oriental'. In this regard, they therefore prefigure the self-congratulation of those later scholar- officials who had so much to say in the wake of the Mutiny-Rebellion about the ever-present dangers that could threaten British interests in India, and about the role of the eternally vigilant intelligence-gatherer as a civilizer and guardian of empire.

But those colonial officers who believed in the reality of an organized pan-India Thug network were often highly ambivalent about its implications with regard to the meaning and importance of caste. As was noted above, a number of early British commentators were inclined to see India as a domain of menacing secret organizations. These writers used the word caste (as well as such terms as sect, race, and tribe) for almost any kind of network or association to which Indians gave their loyalty, often with the implication that these were potentially sinister and conspiratorial bonds of allegiance. Some officials were therefore inclined to define the Thugs as a fixed social or ethnic unit, that is, as the equivalent of an hereditary caste. This is consistent with the adoption of measures which allowed supposed Thugs to be convicted of criminality solely on the testimony of a so-called approver (a confessed Thug), who deposed that an accused person had either been initiated as a strangler or was the offspring of a Thug. In other words, this was a principle of guilt by virtue of blood, descent, or association, rather than proven individual acts of criminality.

By the end of the nineteenth century, this principle of guilt by collective genetic or social inheritance was extended very widely under the enactments of colonial India's notorious Criminal Tribes and Castes Acts (1871, 1911). Yet even these draconian provisions were mediated by the idea that some people's shared criminal 'essences' could be expunged through so-called reclamation or rehabilitation. Here, as in other areas of so-called orientalist knowledge, British thinkers and policy-makers were simply inconsistent. Their thinking was particularly unclear about whether being a Thug, or indeed a member of any other caste, 'tribe', or ethnolinguistic unit, was to be understood as a function of inherent essences, or as involving at least some element of individual will and choice. Certainly in other areas of colonial law, Indians came to be treated as individuals to whom British-style rules of evidence and definitions of personal guilt and innocence did indeed apply, regardless of whatever caste or racial 'essence' they might be deemed to possess.

So Indians who subscribed to caste values were not defined by all orientalists as uncivilized, and 'caste society' was definitely not viewed by every British commentator as a domain of irrationality and disorder.

Indeed in many accounts of the 'uncovering' of *thuggee,* what most alarms the commentators is the elaborate and ordered way in which the so-called strangler gangs were said to have operated. The really fearful part of this was the implication that Thugs somehow inverted the caste rules and proprieties that were beginning to be held up by Europeans as the hallmarks of virtue and normality in India. Thus, Lt Reynolds, one of a number of Company officers who claimed to have penetrated Thug bands in disguise, reported to the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* that the Thugs who 'infested' the state of Hyderabad were generally of superior birth or arms-bearing background, with Brahmans, Rajputs, Sodhis, Ahirs, and Kolis all mixing together and even recruiting well-born Muslims into this unholy 'free-masonry'. One of their strategies of concealment, he claimed, was the use of aliases—Hindus using Muslim names and vice versa, and members of one caste using the titles of another.

The implication here is that much of the horror of *thuggee* was this alleged perversion of the norms and markers of a proper, civilized order of caste communities. And in these revelations about peace and order unmasked as criminality, and faith perverted into fanaticism, one can certainly see emerging an identifiably 'orientalist' yearning for a safer and more stable India. This was a vision of a new and secure colonial milieu in which Indians behaved predictably and lawfully, according to the known proprieties set down in the white man's ever-growing catalogues of 'orientalist' knowledge.

Caste and the Later Victorian Data-Collectors

By the end of the nineteenth century, the colonial authorities were in a very different position from those of their predecessors who had involved themselves in the collection of social and statistical data. From mid-century, the wider intellectual climate affecting the colonial data-collections underwent important changes, most notably through the worldwide elevation of ethnology—the now-discredited science of race—to the status of an authoritative discipline attracting both Western and Asian adherents from almost every branch of the physical and human sciences.

Within India itself, the shock of the 1857 Mutiny-Rebellion drove both military and civil officials to expand and formalize their networks of control and surveillance, and to pursue the quest for social knowledge in ways which differed significantly from the practices of the Company era. Metropolitan developments and pressures were important here too. The abolition of the East India Company in 1858, and the creation of the many new government departments which ran the post-Mutiny Raj, brought closer Parliamentary scrutiny of Indian affairs, and with it a continuing demand for rigour and detail in the reporting of matters with a bearing on both security and finance.

The taste for ethnographic inquiry was also stimulated by new trends in the world of the intellect. In the colonies, as at home, formal schools of social and scientific thought were taking shape in the academic institutions; these were influential in the education of both Europeans and the growing numbers of Indians and other Asians who were being absorbed into the Empire's increasingly vigorous urban intelligentsias. Whether trained in law, medicine, or administration, and even within the military and the missionary organizations, a Victorian professional's career prospects could be significantly advanced if he could claim that his knowledge was 'scientific' and in line with contemporary intellectual and technical trends. Thus, far from being remote from the intellectual ferment which was giving rise to the great debates of Victorian social and scientific theory, in the later nineteenth century there were both British officials and educated Indians for whom the expansion of education and publishing, and the growth and professionalization of the human sciences, created the essential context for their involvement in 'orientalist' knowledge- seeking.

Much was said about caste in this era of debate and administrative reconstruction, and many officials attached new importance to the old idea of so-called Brahmanical caste 'prejudices' as a force which was stronger and potentially more dangerous among some Indian peoples than others. The 1857 Rebellion had begun with an uprising of the Bengal Army's native infantrymen; the army's many critics now felt vindicated for the fears they had been expressing since the 1840s about the policy of making the Bengal regiments a preserve of lordly landed

men. Most of these were Hindus who had been encouraged to lead a life of Brahman-centred piety; this was seen in retrospect to have fostered conspiracy and 'sedition' in the ranks. In the 1860s and 1870s there were attempts to find new and safer recruiting grounds, most notably in the Punjab and Nepal, which had long been perceived in colonial reportage as domains of comparatively 'casteless' martial uplanders. In other areas too, most notably in Rajasthan, there was a push to identify 'manly races' to recruit in place of the discredited Hindustan plainsmen who had dominated the pre-1857 Bengal Army. These concerns generated elaborate attempts to define which peoples, classes, or 'races' possessed appropriate martial qualities, with an insistence on minimizing the recruitment of 'Brahmanized' Indians, and an attempt to make the new regiments of supposedly casteless Sikhs, Gurkhas, and other incomers conscious of shared heritage and identity.

This period also brought the first timid moves to vest small groups of Indians with a limited measure of representative political power as members of the provincial legislative councils. And with the creation of India's first direct income tax, officials hoped to reduce the pressure on those 'peasant' groups who had supported the 1857 Rebellion. These were all developments which pushed officials to record and publish more social data than ever before, and to subject a far wider range of Indians to formal techniques of classification and enumeration. As was noted above, the all-India Census was the key instrument here. In their different and often contradictory ways, the compilers of the decennial censuses treated the phenomena they knew as caste as fundamental to the lives of many if not all Indians, compiling data on the supposed differentials of rank and status between caste groups in ways which stimulated fierce debate among both Britons and Indians.

There was also much 'essentializing' reportage in the monumental 119-volume series of *Imperial Gazetteers* which was produced under the direction of one of India's most influential scholar-officials, W.W Hunter (1840—1900). Many other forms of statistical and analytical material emanated from government operations in arenas ranging from state-funded education to the administration of forests, fisheries, hospitals, jails, and public works. These and other domains of state

power were rapidly creating centralized bureaucracies at provincial and all-India level, and were recruiting ever larger numbers of literate Indians to collect and tabulate their data. Ever larger numbers of people were therefore familiarized with the terminology and conventions of these 'orientalist' enterprises.

This period's profound though uneven economic changes were equally important in the making of these denser and more probing forms of orientalism. The take-off of commercial agriculture, the expansion of the roads, railways, and steam-powered shipping networks, and the large-scale movement of labour into new areas of cash-crop production, all generated demands for data and official categorization, with much discussion of which kinds of people were mentally and physiologically suitable for the Ceylon tea estates, the rubber plantations of Malaya, and the other overseas migration zones. As increasing numbers of Indians were brought into the cash nexus, there was a growing range of situations in which would-be wage workers, military recruits, and many other seekers of new economic opportunities found it either necessary or desirable to present themselves to some outside authority or agency for purposes of formal classification. As Chapter 5 will show, it was often people of very low standing in conventional caste terms who made significant gains in these circumstances, even though this process of categorization helped to strengthen and perpetuate their identification as 'untouchables'.

There were also problems of control in the expanding commercial and industrial towns, encouraging the police and other officials to devise mass surveillance techniques which emphasized corporate 'essentialisms'. In the countryside, colonial officials charged with the imposition or 'settlement' of standard rates of land revenue moved to abolish the revenue differentials which had formerly benefited such people as arms-bearers and the descendants of Brahman specialists recruited by pre-colonial rulers. This process generated much talk of tillers who were 'skilful' and productive by nature—the sturdy 'Jat', the 'manly' Kanbi 'race', the thrifty 'Shanar'—as opposed to declining parasitical 'Rajputs', 'thievish' Kallars, or Marava arms-bearers and 'feckless' hill- and forest-dwelling 'aboriginals'. These stereotypes both

echoed and enhanced the differentiations which many Indians were now making along the lines described in the previous chapter, that is between the upright man of Brahman or merchant *ahimsa* values and the various aggressive, parasitical, or 'uncivilized' peoples from whom they were now seeking to distinguish themselves.

None of these developments was wholly new, as was shown above in the discussion of early colonial legal debates. But this typing of people by caste or caste-like statuses was made considerably more comprehensive during the later nineteenth century. Until the launching of the decennial all-India Census, it had never before officially been said that all Indians, rural and urban, elite and lowly, could or should be included in a single master exercise of tabulation which would identify every adult individual by both 'religion' and caste or so-called tribal 'community', as well as by occupation, age, and sex.

Indeed the counting of women was one of the great novelties of this process: not until 1872 were women included as 'members' of individual castes by the compilers of local population statistics. It may seem self-evident today that a woman born of a certain jati or 'subcaste' should be regarded as a permanent 'member' of that caste or birth-group. This is, in fact, an issue on which modern anthropologists have been divided, particularly among those north Indians who are held to practise hypergamous 'upward' marriage. For these groups it is a man's caste identity that has generally been seen as comparatively fixed and stable, while that of an 'up' marrying bride may be seen as undergoing readjustment to match that of her new marital kin. Some of the more perceptive colonial commentators were also familiar with hypergamous marriage strategies, and were far from simplistic in their account of how this affected regional caste 'systems'. Indeed this is one of the many instances of 'colonial' knowledge being richer and more nuanced than is sometimes thought. It is certainly not a case of fabricated ethnographic findings being somehow imposed on Indians in ways that then made them change their values or everyday actions.

At the same time, growing numbers of Indians acquired an interest in orientalist writings and statistical exercises particularly the classified

caste tables in the provincial Census reports. It certainly was an innovation for these publications to rank, standardize and cross-reference their caste listings on principles derived from Western zoology and botanical classification. These exercises purported to aggregate and rank supposedly comparable castes from different regions under a variety of general occupational headings with the aim of establishing who was superior to whom in any part of India by virtue of their supposed purity, occupational origins, and collective moral worth.

There were the bureaucratic operations which made it appear that colonial ethnographers regarded castes as a giant ladder of precedence defined by the logic of the four-varna scheme, with every jati a fixed unit possessing a known place and status which could be measured against that of any other caste group. Actually, not all scholar-officials identified Indians in terms of botanical or zoological specimens, and some at least strongly criticized these exercises. Many data-collectors were well aware that these tabulations were little more than a caricature of the complex and multi-faceted reality of caste.

Yet Indians did have reason to take these listings seriously, most notably when they found the authorities using them for such purposes as deciding which communities were 'manly' enough to provide recruits for the colonial army. Indeed the experience of caste is and probably always has been shaped by what was done when rulers and their agents spoke with authority on matters of collective rank and 'essences'. By the end of the century, a growing array of official materials including military recruitment manuals, gazetteers, and Census reports featured listings assigning people of particular title and background to a certain order of status ('ruling' or 'military' caste, for example, as opposed to 'scavengers' and 'lower village menials'), with either honourable or ignominious qualities being imputed to each group.

It is no wonder that many Indians took these matters seriously, becoming skilled in manipulating the Census lists, and taking pains to communicate their views and claims about these processes both to other Indians and to the colonial authorities. Indeed, by the later nineteenth century there were some Indians with appropriate scribal

and statistical skills who launched their own caste enumeration projects, in some cases adapting colonial Census methods in order to supplement older forms of almanac data produced to popularize regional guru networks and holy places. And as far as the official British Census was concerned, the debates and protests that ensued from the compiling of these listings involved both Indians and British scholar-officials. These exchanges undeniably gave new shape and emphasis to what we would now see as the everyday reality of caste.

Caste and the Race Theorists

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, British ideas about caste cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the growing force of ethnological race science in the interpretation of social data, not just in India, but in both the West and the wider colonial world. By the end of the century, the emerging academic field of anthropology had become a crucial reference point in the writings of scholar-officials in India. Many were keen followers of the debates which engaged contributors to the new discipline's metropolitan publications, especially those like the *Journal of Anthropology,* the *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London,* and *The Anthropological Review* which were dominated by ethnologists.

At the same time, those claiming expertise on south Asian life and thought were active in the shaping of the new discipline's debates and modes of inquiry; by the end of the century, a number of major Indian cities contained flourishing anthropological societies. Both Indian and British writers contributed to these societies' journals. Indeed one of the earliest expressions by an Indian scholar of a nationalist political version of Aryan race theory appeared in 1863 in the *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London.* This essay was by Gannender Mohun Tagore, professor of both Hindu law and Bengali language at University College, London (1861—5). In the essay, the author cites evidence from Strabo, Herodotus, and the *Institutes* of Manu on the origins of 'Brahmanical polity' in ancient India (which he calls Aryavarta'), and contrasts the 'wild independence' of India's 'aboriginal tribes' with the 'superior genius' of the Aryan race', and the leading role which its

builders of advanced political order had played in the 'progressive development' of all humanity. [*]

From these interactions between metropolitan and Indian concerns and institutions emerged two important but very different accounts of caste. Those, like Hunter, as well as the key figures of H.H. Risley (1851-1911) and his protégé Edgar Thurston, who were disciples of the French race theorist Topinard and his European followers, subsumed discussions of caste into theories of biologically determined race essences, and thereby played a critical role in the intellectual history of India and the Empire at large. Their great rivals were the material or occupational theorists led by the ethnographer and folklorist William Crooke (1848-1923), author of one of the most widely read provincial *Castes and Tribes* surveys, and such other influential scholar-officials as Denzil Ibbetson and E.A.H. Blunt.

To start with the first of these two schools of thought—the racial understanding of caste—the teachings of the nineteenth-century race theorists are rightly abhorred today. Nevertheless, their ideas can still be discerned in the doctrines of many late twentieth-century ultranationalist movements both in the West and in the extra-European world, including those of south Asia's Hindu and Muslim ethnic supremacists.

As has already been seen, references to race—and particularly the idea of ancient migrations by members of a primordial Aryan (or sometimes 'Hindu') 'race' or 'nation' of fair-skinned, vigorous freedom-lovers—featured in the writings of Sir William Jones and his contemporaries. But these eighteenth- and early-nineteenth- century orientalists did not conceive of race in the physiological and evolutionary terms which were embraced by later ethnological theorists. With the rise of the new 'scientific' anthropology both within and beyond the Empire, older conventions and typologists were picked up and reshaped in a spirit of deep anxiety about matters which were certainly relevant to empire, but which were not confined to the exercise of power in any one colonial milieu. On the contrary, the evolutionary principles which had been widely embraced in Western

countries from the mid-nineteenth century were rooted in a vision of all humanity as contestants in a ceaseless racial struggle. Ethnologists saw these conflicts as subject to merciless and impersonal scientific laws. Some observers of empire interpreted these laws to mean that Britain's global power might one day be superseded by the rise of 'fresher' and more 'vigorous' peoples or nations, meaning the Germans or the Japanese, or even Britain's so-called Aryan 'cousins' in India.

From the mid-century, many of the most influential compilations of Indian ethnographic data were shaped by these ethnological perspectives. This was a form of 'orientalism' which did not treat caste as the defining feature of history and social organization for all Indians. On the contrary, followers of ethnology portrayed India as a composite social landscape in which only certain peoples had evolved historically in ways which left them 'shackled' by a hierarchical ideology of caste. Paradoxically these 'Brahmanized' Indians were identified by ethnologists as those who possessed superior 'Aryan' blood, meaning that they were supposedly descended from the same racial 'stock' as the white European, whose key ethnological endowment was the capacity to achieve 'nationhood'.

Much was made of this idea that in ethnological terms, so-called Aryan Indians were true though debased versions of their British conquerors, with a common racial heritage of 'virility' and warlike energy. Those who subscribed to these perspectives generally held that the development of caste ideologies had taken the 'Asiatic' branch of the Aryan family' into an evolutionary cul-de-sac. Yet according to many commentators, this was potentially reversible. As of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, 'Aryan' caste Hindus were widely said by both Indian and British race theorists to be 'awaking' in evolutionary terms. For many, the proof of this was the formation of such organizations as the Indian National Congress and the Hindu 'revivalist' Arya Samaj, both of which were held to show that Indians were acquiring a sense of 'national' purpose which might ultimately supersede their supposedly divisive jati and varna affinities.

When ethnologists studied caste, then, most of them were doing so as a subsidiary exercise in this supposedly higher and grander task of uncovering the evolutionary heritage of all humanity. Furthermore, even when they contributed to such 'orientalist' exercises as the Census and the Imperial Gazetteers, the theorists did not necessarily see the entire Indian (or Hindu) population as part of an all-pervading 'caste system' which made all Indians radically inferior to their white colonial rulers.

It is true that Risley, who was the Empire's leading proponent of ethnology from the 1890s until his death in 1911, saw caste as a real factor in Indian life, an 'elemental force like gravitation or molecular attraction' that in his view gave order to the society, and saved it from chaos. Risley also anticipated the fieldwork methodologies and even some of the analytical insights of late-twentieth-century anthropologists. Indeed there is a surprisingly modernizing tone to some of his observations. This can best be seen in his advocacy of detailed local kinship studies, on the basis of which he claimed to have found certain 'tribal' populations undergoing what in the 1960s came to be called 'Sanskritisation', that is, the taking on of the attributes of a conventional ranked Hindu jati.

Risley is best known for his scheme of hierarchical classification which divided Indians into seven racial 'types', with dark-skinned 'Dravidians' defined as the most 'primitive', and fair 'Indo-Aryan' the most ethnologically 'advanced'. His most widely quoted remark is his claim to have discovered an unfailing 'law' of caste, this being that 'the social status of . . . a particular group varies in inverse ratio to the mean relative width of their noses'. [*] As Census Commissioner for the 1901 Census of India and honorary director of the Ethnological Survey of the Indian Empire, Risley's chief priority was the placing of Indian ethnological research on what he called a 'proper' official footing. He conceived of grand schemes for the mapping and measurement of every racial 'type' and 'specimen' in the subcontinent, and shared with other ethnologists the fear that Britain was being outdone by Germany in the official sponsorship of race science.

This was a worrying prospect since ethnology taught that the display of 'masterful' intellect was a mark of collective racial vigour, and thus a sign of a nation's capacity to dominate and civilise its supposed racial inferiors. Only the 'higher-races' were fit for 'places of power' on the world stage. Ethnological publications had been spec-ulating since the 1860s about the comparative racial strengths of the British and their 'Teutonic' rivals. Risley argued that it would be proof that Britain was losing its lead as a dynamic and racially purposeful power if Britons failed to exploit India's unique potential as a field for ethnological research.

Thus, to the more romantic and visionary followers of this discipline, the purpose of ethnological inquiry was far more than a matter of solving the colonial state's administrative and strategic problems. All peoples, said the advocates of race science, whether they were writing about Asians, Africans, or Europeans, were predisposed to weakness or strength, subjugation or dominance, slavishness or freedom-loving individualism, on the basis of racial factors which could be most accurately mapped in physiological rather than lingu-istic or environmental terms. Race was perceived as a universal human endowment, and all humankind was subject to its forces of blood and inheritance.

'Civilization', however, was equated by ethnologists with a bent towards the creation of libertarian political institutions. Those who had achieved this 'civilized' state were thus to be seen as members of ethnologically 'advanced' races. In some cases, however, it was India's 'pre-Aryan aboriginals' and other supposedly 'free' and 'casteless' peoples who were thought to be 'virile' and dynamic in ethnological terms. Commentators with these views often drew racial conclusions from contemporary history, particularly from key moments of colonial crisis, including the 1857 Mutiny-Rebellion and the 1855—7 insurrection of the 'tribal' Santal people of Bengal. Surprising though it may seem, these events told some ethnologists that the potential for true 'nationhood' could be discerned in the actions of these Indians, especially such 'pre-Aryan' people as the Santals and so-called Bediya gypsies' of Bengal. Both Indian and British ethnologists took this view.

Yet another Bengali contributor to a London race science journal, Babu Rajendralala Mitra, says of the Bediya: 'attachment to their nationality is extreme . . .; no Bediya has ever been known to denounce his race.'

According to a number of writers, however, ethnological dynamism and receptiveness of 'civilizing' influences were most notable in those cases where hill and forest 'aboriginals' had begun to embrace Christianity. Thus religion too was widely regarded as an expression of racial endowments, with the faith of the modern 'enlightened' Christian being characterized as the apex of human moral evolution, and subjection to Brahmanical 'priestcraft' a sign of comparative evolutionary backwardness. Above all, there were held to be eternal deep-seated antipathies between those who were supposedly higher on this scale of evolutionary attainment and those of inferior or 'debased' and 'degenerate' blood. The ethnologists' tracing of racial interactions presumed a landscape of danger, competition, and animosity, with all human history as a manifestation of these unforgiving ethnological principles. As understood by race theorists, the laws of human evolution allowed of no security for those who had made evolutionary 'advances', including those peoples who had established themselves as rulers and civilizers. Even those endowed with superior ethnological qualities were eternally vulnerable; the global 'struggle for mastery' allowed of no permanent winners or survivors, and degeneration or even annihilation were inescapable for even the fittest and most vigorous of racial groups.

This vision of eternal evolutionary race war is explicitly endorsed in the writings of WW Hunter, one of the earliest exponents of the new anthropological methodologies within the Indian Civil Service. [*] Hunter's extravagantly written *Annals of Rural Bengal,* published in 1868, portrays the Bengal region as a living ethnological battleground. Its social order, he proclaimed, was shaped by a history of titanic warfare between ancient Sanskrit-speaking 'Aryans' and the rude 'aboriginal races', who had been overrun in the 'primitive time' by the bearers of superior 'Aryan civilization'.

Far from serving as a static display of conventional 'caste' relationships, Bengal's human 'specimens' provide Hunter with a picture of grim, degenerative, racial catastrophe: 'Our earliest glimpses of the human family in India disclose two tribes of widely different origin, struggling for the mastery.' According to Hunter, the incoming Aryans 'came of a conquering stock' and were imbued with 'that high sense of nationality which burns in the hearts of a people who believe themselves, the depositary of a divine revelation.' In Bengal, however, the once-noble Aryan conquerors gradually lost out, becoming degenerate and contaminating their 'enlightened' faith with 'degrading superstitions' absorbed from what Hunter calls, revoltingly, the 'squat, black [aboriginal] races'. [*]

On this basis, Hunter, like many of his contemporaries, insisted that the Indian order of castes had been misperceived as an ancient and immutable system based on Hindu *religious* principles, and dividing the entire Indian population into the all-encompassing varnas of classic Indological theory. Caste for Hunter was quite different: a 'cruel' but diverse and regionally specific creation of relatively recent *race* history. It appeared in India in two distinct forms. First, says Hunter, caste in its 'true' sense was a creation of Aryan settlers in Gangetic Upper India where in comparatively recent times the original 'fresh' and virile Aryan 'fighting tribes' had gradually subsided into degeneracy, becoming a society of 'mild-eyed philosophers' strolling aimlessly in their mango groves, creating pointlessly elaborate rituals, and wrangling over empty points of sectarian doctrine. This, for Hunter, was the counter-evolutionary development that produced caste in its 'true' Aryan form, that is, as a 'national code', 'disfiguring' the strengths of unified Aryan 'nationhood' and 'ruining' the 'Sanskrit people'.

Secondly, and in sharp contrast to his idea of caste in this Upper Indian or 'Aryan' form, Hunter gives an account of caste in Bengal. This he sees as a region where what Europeans thought of as caste was actually a 'deformed' institution, one which was fundamentally different from the social norms created by hegemonic 'Aryans' in Hindustan. In Bengal, he wrote, what was called caste was actually a manifestation of

race war, that is, a product of the opposition of 'high' and 'low' races, the 'conquerors and the conquered'. Far from representing a purely 'social' distinction between different ranks of the same superior 'Aryan', caste in Bengal was for Hunter an embodiment of differentiation and irreconcilable revulsion between radically unlike races. As a result, the emergence of what Hunter saw as an extreme ideology of stratification and ritual ranking between caste groups was to be explained in evolutionary racial terms. Vegetarianism and the other rules of a Bengali high-'caste' lifestyle reflected the 'higher' race's deep-seated abhorrence for the 'black-skinned, human-sacrificing, flesh-eating forest tribes'.

Of course there is no intention here to give any credence to this repellent material. Yet it is important to see that for Hunter, Risley, and their fellow race theorists the point of such analysis was that *all* societies had an ethnological story to tell. In this story Indians were not all characterized in the same evolutionary terms. Race theorists did not refer to Indians and Europeans as members of two distinct or homogeneous races, and neither the 'Aryan' nor the non-'Aryan' Indian was dismissed by all race theorists as the evolutionary 'inferior' of all so-called Aryan whites.

Nor, even more importantly, was this ethnological story one in which caste occurs as the paramount institution of Indian life. Like Hunter, Darwin's champion, T.H. Huxley, writing in 1869, conceived of a racially diverse India in which the two predominant groupings were, yet again strong, pale Aryans and small, dark, defeated Dravidians, the dispossessed ancestors of modern India's 'primitive' southern 'hill tribes'. Emphasizing yet again the ethnologist's motif of universal race confrontation, these groups' supposed conflicts, migrations, and inter-breeding had purportedly marked out the subcontinent into contentious historic battle zones of separate culture, language and racial 'type'.

Huxley's contemporary, Walter Elliot, wrote in similar terms, subdividing the peoples of south India into no less than six distinct racial categories. In his view the bearers of a particular 'caste' title were

never marked off from other groups by the physiological marks and endowments on which ethnologists relied to classify what they thought of as higher and lower 'types' and 'races'. 'Parias', he says, were sometimes 'fair and tall' with 'good' features; other members of the same 'nation' were 'black and squat', with 'the lowest and most debased cast of countenance'.

It should be noted then that Victorian race theorists generally subscribed to this view that Brahman-centred caste ideologies were absent or unimportant in the lives of significant numbers of Indians. Caste, as they saw it, was an evolutionary weapon adopted in the distant past by certain Indians, primarily the descendants of light-skinned superior Aryans who devised conventions of exclusion and ritual distance in a struggle to maintain the purity of their 'blood' and race in circumstances demanding extraordinary measures of ethnological boundary-making. All this was consistent with the strongly eugenicist overtones of ethnology, which taught that degeneration and racial decline were the inevitable consequence of 'miscegenation' between peoples of advanced and inferior racial 'stock'.

Elliot therefore assigns to a single racial category the Kurumba hill people of Malabar and other so-called 'simple' hunting and pastoral groups whom he sees as close racial kin of the Bengal Santals. For Elliot, these peoples' chief ethnological trait was that they were 'free and unfettered by caste', sharing a common descent from a single 'highly civilized' population with a marked ethnological taste for 'freedom'. Like Hunter, Elliot made much of these and other 'pre- Aryan' peoples, who were supposedly endowed with 'noble' and 'in-dependent' racial traits and whom he saw as having been oppressed over many centuries by so-called Brahman tyranny. Such views were widely reaffirmed after 1900 as offering 'scientific' justification for the claims of those who called themselves representatives of both 'non- Brahmanism' and the interests of so-called primordial or 'tribal' (Adi Dharm and Adi Dravida) peoples.

In contrast to other south Indians, whom he assigns to four separate categories of unfree, servile, predatory, and 'civilized' people, Elliot

asserts that the Kurumba were formerly independent princes of Malabar; in the Carnatic the same people formed a 'federal community' of '24 states or castes'. The sad modern plight of these once- strong warrior-pastoralists is for Elliot a demonstration of that key principle of the racial theorists, this being the notion of the decay or degeneration of race, the result of various phenomena including racial 'miscegenation' and the superseding of free, 'democratic' government by 'despotism'.

This vision of free tribal republicanism is strikingly reminiscent of Henry Maine's discussion of primordial Indian 'village republics'. Elliot therefore applies to 'Dravidian' south India a form of evolutionary political analysis that was already being spelled out in the works of theorists who were concerned, not just with India, but with all societies in which particular legal and constitutional forms were regarded as markets of free 'citizenries' and 'republican' liberties, both in the past and among living 'primitives'.

Other scholar-officials also distinguished between 'new' and 'old Aryans', the 'old' being those whose institutions were 'less democratic' than those of later racial colonizers who supposedly shaped the societies of both north and south India. In the Punjab, especially, the first Aryan migrants were supposedly succeeded by waves of 'advancing Jats'. These 'robust and warlike' people were members of a 'fresher race' whose institutions were hailed for their superior ethnological qualities. 'In their institutions they are extremely democratic; every village is a perfect little republic.'

The Material or Occupational Interpretation of Caste

To turn now to the second of the two schools of thought mentioned above, this picture of 'fresh', vigorous and 'democratic' Jats had a strong impact on Denzil Ibbetson's portrayal of caste in the Punjab. Ibbetson too perceived Brahmans and Brahmanical standards of rank and hierarchy as a marginal feature of this regional society. On much else, however, materialists such as Ibbetson, Crooke, Blunt, John Nesfield, and William Logan differed profoundly from those like Risley who saw race as the paramount factor in the analysis of caste.

Ibbetson's work, in particular, prefigures some of the most sophisticated insights of modern caste theorists, particularly in its insistence on diversity and historicity in the making of caste. Far from generalizing about the whole of India as a uniform 'caste society', Ibbetson saw the Punjab as a highly distinctive environment in which the aspiring theorist of caste had to explain the distinctively non-'castelike' features of much of its rural population. He saw caste ideologies as having come to be manifested in highly varied ways in different regional settings, insisting on the dynamic and fluid nature of caste, and giving much emphasis to material and political factors in the shaping of these different versions of jati and varna.

Although at some points Ibbetson's discussion echoes the standard orientalist clichés about lascivious Brahmans and 'degraded' Hindu 'ritualism', he moves on to another plane entirely in his account of the landowners, cultivators, and pastoralists who constituted as much as half of the Punjab's population in the later nineteenth century. These people he describes as open and flexible in their deployment of such 'caste' names as Rajput, Jat, Meo, Gujar, and Thakur; they are emphatically not passive, tyrannized victims of received 'Brahmanical' orthodoxies. To him, such titles as Jat and Rajput signalled distinctions of political power which were fluid and variable, and not closed units of hierarchical 'caste' identity. Human agency is pre-eminent at every stage in Ibbetson's analysis. Thus 'caste' as a Brahman's vision of the world, a vision emphasizing rank, purity, and what he calls 'artificial' criteria of lifestyle including vegetarianism and prohibitions on widow- marriage, is a known reference point to which these rural 'yeomen' may or may not defer, depending in part on the strength of the anti- Brahmanical Sikh and Muslim faiths in their home locales.

For Ibbetson, then, both the Punjab and the northwest frontier regions were open societies where the difference between the 'Jat' and the 'Rajput' was not a matter of blood or fixed ethnological fact, nor a response to universal Brahman scriptural mandates inherited from the ancient past. In his view, such differentiations were a fluid representation of status as claimed by men of power. Furthermore, 'tribe' and not 'caste' was for Ibbetson the universal fact of rural life in the Punjab.

Nesfield says much the same in his account of caste in the North Western Provinces. In Ibbetson's work, the word tribe refers to affiliations such as Chauhan, Sial, and Punwar, by which, he says, kin-based groups from within his rural 'yeoman' populations define themselves as superior holders of localized agrarian territories.

Ibbetson's emphasis is thus on these factual and visible realities of power and land control as opposed to the open and variable measurements of status which he regards as being embodied in the use of such 'caste' titles as Jat or Rajput. As far as Rajputs are concerned, the title Rajput was not a measurement of superior 'Aryan' blood as it was for the ethnologists; it was instead a reference to the indigenous 'occupational' facts of kingliness and power, and the bonds of affiliation and patronage through which a lord acknowledges the services of his retainers. There was nothing fixed or immutable about these identities. 'In former times, before caste distinctions had become crystallized, any tribe or family whose ancestor . . . rose to royal rank became in time Rajput.' And in his own time, the process of shifting and realigning of 'caste' rank was 'going on daily around us'.

With hindsight, it seems likely that the ideas of the ethnologists about human actions as expressions of immutable scientific laws and race essence would have sounded more persuasive to officials with experience of Bengal and the far south, rather than other provinces. This would be consistent with the more paternalist administrative traditions that had emerged in the Punjab and some parts of the Gangetic northwest. In particular, those involved in administering the Punjab canal colonies and comparable schemes of interventionist economic 'uplift' elsewhere would have had reason to be dubious about theories which appeared to deny agency and individual initiative to at least some Indians, especially to the 'sturdy peasants' and 'virile tribesmen' who were expected to make good, 'manly' soldiers, and to be receptive and energetic in their response to 'improving' administrative influence. At the same time, much of what Ibbetson says about caste in the Punjab suggests not idealistic fantasizing, but a high degree of accuracy in his observations of Punjab society. Despite his use of dated 'colonial' language, and his inevitable dependence on observations

made through the operations of colonial revenue settlement work, in his writing we really do see the beginning of modern regionally-based Indian anthropology.

Furthermore, it is not surprising that these interpreters of caste have had a more enduring influence than their ethnological rivals. Ibbetson and his fellow believers in the occupational and material basis of caste were after all in tune with yet another key strand in the thinking of Western social theorists. This was the attempt in both liberal and emerging Marxist analysis to formulate economic understandings of the past—and also of the contemporary world—with growing importance attributed to modes of property holding, as well as an interest in the interactions of labour and capital. [*]

Between Ibbetson and Risley, then, there certainly was no homogenizing colonial 'consensus' on the subject of caste. In the writings of Ibbetson, and also in Crooke and Blunt, there is no message of doom and degeneration in regard to the familiar old theme of environmentally propitious regions—the Punjab hills, the arid open terrain of Rajasthan—where Rajputs, Jats, and Pathans supposedly displayed the 'hardy', 'chivalrous', and individualist qualities of a 'tribal' social and political order. The influence of James Tod, the most influential early historian of the Rajput 'race', is particularly marked here, together with that of other early-nineteenth-century commentators whose key point of reference was the theme of constitutional liberties, and the mapping of societies which were supposedly comparable to those from which the freedom-loving Briton had evolved.

It was on this basis that Tod and his admirers had made much of the free-speaking, un-Brahmanized, and egalitarian 'tribal' arms-bearers whom they believed to have flourished in zones of temperate terrain and climate. The influence of this environmental logic is apparent in the work of Crooke, Blunt, and a number of other writers. In their works, when 'hardy' populations of this type can be identified, they are not to be lumped with weaker and 'unmanly' lowland peoples for whom caste constituted a very different and much more debilitating bond of social

and moral adhesion, and who were therefore corruptible and submissive in the face of priestcraft and despotism. 'The Bengali and his cousin from Assam may be . . . identified by their lanky stature . . . and want of robustness. With them . . . the intellectual have grown at the expense of the physical qualities . . . and they would in troubled times fall easy victims to the stronger races from the upper plains and hills.' For the great majority of plains-dwellers, '[a] powerful priesthood and the bondage of caste repress originality of thought and freedom of action'.

The point, however, is that not all Indians were thought to be like this.

> In . . . [Rajputana] the Rajputs have maintained their tribal system and freedom unimpaired [even after the expansion of Mughal, Maratha and British power] . . . In a Rajput State the chief is the head of the clan by whom the country was settled. He is not a despot, but exercises a jurisdiction more or less limited over an aristocracy, the members of which are his kinsmen and connections . . . This is not exactly feudalism, but something resembling it. It is the only really free constitution within the Empire . . . Most . . . observers of Rajputs and Jats . . . consider them to be of the same stock . . . The Jats are a most interesting people . . . [Their] character seems to be largely the result of environment—they have grown grave and impassive like the great white oxen which they prize so dearly . . . [The Jat] is a fine, manly fellow, and has special interest for us because his tribe supplies some of our best Sikh sepoys.
>
> [Rajputs are] . . . liable to sudden outbreaks of passion . . . [and a] tendency to panic on the battlefield, [with an] inability, as a result of their tribal system, to form a permanent combination against a public enemy . . . These defects they share with most orientals, but, on the whole, they compare favourably with other races in the Indian Empire. There is much in their character and institutions which reminds us of the Gauls as pictured by Mommsen [in his *History of Rome* 1866) . . .

It is clear then that even at their most arrogantly 'essentializing', these writers were discerning elements in India's social order which they found both admirable and alarming. Furthermore, their responses to this did not involve a stereotype of all Indians, or even all 'caste Hindus', as timid or unmanly.

For Ibbetson too, 'caste' differentials were therefore based on distinctions of occupation, individual achievement, and political resources, rather than concepts of higher or lower 'types' and 'races'. His Indians are individuals, achievers of land, power, and distinction by virtue of personal attainment and historically dynamic interactions, not passive recipients of race essences or binding cultural codes. And above all, he insisted that the standing of different groups in a particular locality was governed by political considerations, that is, the distinction between those who ruled and those who were politically 'subject'. [*]

It is notable that some of the most sophisticated official anthropology of the early twentieth century was therefore moving in the same direction in its analysis of Indian society as the 'progressive wing' of the Indian National Congress. This can further be seen in the similarity between the views of Sir Malcolm Darling (1880—1964), author of *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt* (1925), and the leading Congress Socialists, including Jawaharlal Nehru. It is this emerging public debate about caste within the Indian intelligentsias which is the subject of the next chapter.

4

The Ordering of Difference *

THOMAS R. METCALF

The strategies devised by the British to comprehend India were never simply intellectual exercises, nor were they meant only in some general way to justify British rule over the subcontinent. Always these theories, whether of race or gender, of an unchanging or of a feudal India, found meaning as they were used to order India's peoples and their past. Through them what the British conceived of as India's enduring difference was given shape in administrative practices. This process of ordering India was not driven wholly by political objectives. It was also part of the larger Enlightenment endeavour, by observation and study, to understand the world outside Europe, as Europeans came to know it more fully. A relentless need to count and classify everything they encountered defined much Victorian intellectual activity. For the most part too, as they set out to order the peoples who inhabited their new Indian dominion, the British sought to fit the categories they used to the society they purported to describe. Indeed, Indians themselves, especially the Brahmin informants and assistants who worked with the British, by the information they pro-vided shaped much of the ethnographic project. Still, under the Raj the knowledge the British amassed cannot be separated from its role in the successful working of colonial rule. India was 'known' in ways that would sustain a system of

colonial authority, and through categories that made it fundamentally different from Europe.

The theories of 'difference' the British devised, as we have seen, despite their claims to scientific precision, were never wholly coherent, nor were they free of internal contradiction. As they were deployed by India's colonial administrators, these contradictions became ever more difficult to contain. Often mutually inconsistent theories were cobbled together to achieve particular political purposes, and controversy frequently erupted over how best to fit the ungainly facts of India's social order into the 'proper' modes of explanation. Inevitably, the endeavour to create a coherent social order involved the creation everywhere of what could only be called 'exceptions'. Furthermore, as the colonial sociology of India was tied to a system of power, the British necessarily eschewed at once those categories which would announce India's similarity to Britain and those which might threaten the colonial order. To be sure, classificatory schemes familiar to the British at home were not entirely absent. Occupation, for instance, played an important role in the British ordering of Indian society. Nevertheless, categories meant to denote India's difference, above all those of caste, community, and tribe, were placed at the heart of the country's social system. Class, by contrast, which Victorian Englishmen regarded as the great divide in their own society, was nowhere to be found in British accounts of India's peoples. Despite its inconsistencies and its subordination to the needs of colonial rule, the British ethnographic enterprise had far-reaching consequences for these various categories—of caste and community, of race and sect—informed the ways in which the British, and in time the Indians themselves, conceived of the basic structures of their society.

Ordering India's Peoples

Initially, as they first came to know India in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the British described its peoples through a variety of classificatory systems in which occupational and caste rankings jostled with one other. There was unanimity on little more than the superior position of the Brahmin. Such views gained force

from the textual studies of the early Oriental scholars, who adopted as their own the Brahminical view of India as a land whose peoples were forever fixed into positions defined by the four great *varna* categories of Brahmin, *ksatriya, vaisya,* and *sudra,* with the untouchables set beneath them all. By the turn of the nineteenth century, however, above all in the wake of the conquests of Lord Wellesley, when the British began to make their way into the Indian countryside, direct observation began to assume greater importance in the gathering of information on Indian society. The extensive tours of Francis Buchanan through Mysore and eastern India, and of Colin Mackenzie throughout southern India, can be said to have inaugurated the era of a 'scientific' understanding of India based on detailed local knowledge.

Both Buchanan and Mackenzie amassed vast amounts of information on the working of Indian society. In his survey of Bihar, Buchanan collected statistics on housing, health, occupation, family size, and education, among other subjects, and even attempted to estimate standards of living for various classes of labourers. So detailed are his statistics that modern researchers have sought to use them as a baseline from which to measure changes in economic well-being in the subsequent colonial era. In similar fashion, with the help of Brahmin assistants, Mackenzie collected local histories, religious and philosophical texts, coins, images, and antiquities, and made extensive plans and drawings wherever he went. Mackenzie's collecting enthusiasms far exceeded even the requirements of the colonial state, which remained always dubious of the value of his vast hordes of material. Although his collections announced Britain's control over India, Mackenzie's activities participated as much in the omnivorous empiricism characteristic of nineteenth-century British amateur science.

Neither Buchanan nor Mackenzie, as they toured India, paid much attention to what was later to define India's distinctiveness—the caste system. References to caste in the work of both men are haphazard and unsystematic. For Buchanan occupation largely defined the nature of caste, while Mackenzie's local histories for the most part recount the origins and doings of the chiefs and rajas of southern India, not its

castes. The British in India in these years of discovery also commissioned extensive collections of drawings of various castes and peoples of India. But these too, informed by romanticism and the cult of the picturesque, sought primarily to capture the likeness of colourfully dressed soldiers and courtiers, itinerant merchants, and exotic holy men, as well as those, identified by occupation, with whom the British came into daily contact, such as their own vast array of household servants. These lists and drawings were, moreover, highly idiosyncratic. No attempt was made to organize them into a coherent caste 'system'.

The lack of interest in a systematic ordering of caste during the early decades of the nineteenth century was not surprising. Engaged as they were in conquering the country, the British sought, above all else, immediately useful information about India's resources and the character of those chieftains whom they were endeavouring to subdue into revenue-paying subjects. While the drawings in such collections as Mackenzie's made India's 'difference' readily visible, British notions of the character of that 'difference' were not as yet clearly established, so that caste existed as no more than an ethnographic curiosity. Insofar as it claimed any meaning for the men of the generation of Macaulay and Trevelyan it was as an emblem of India's degradation, and as a barrier to its improvement.

As British rule by mid-century became increasingly secure, and as the reforming impulse waned, the colonial search for knowledge took on a new shape. After the Mutiny, anxious to rule India without disrupting its established social institutions, and driven by an ever more compelling commitment to 'scientific' understanding, the British set out to reduce to a comprehensible order what they saw as the baffling variety of India's myriad peoples. By the 1860s, as we saw in chapter 3, ideas of 'difference' defined an India that had become a 'laboratory of mankind' or 'living museum', where ancient customs, habits, and practices endured up to the present. Denied a history of their own, the peoples of India were defined by unchanging racial and cultural identities. The most important of these, by far, was caste. As Bernard Cohn has written, for late Victorian anthropologists 'a caste was a

"thing", an entity which was concrete and measurable; above all it had definable characteristics—endogamy, commensality rules, fixed occupation, common ritual practices; and these 'things' could be ascertained and quantified for reports and surveys. Once fitted together in an organized hierarchy, this 'system' could be taken as providing a comprehensive and authoritative understanding of Indian society. India was, in this view, no more than the sum of its parts, and the parts were castes. Of course, as we shall see, the apparent rigour was deceptive, for this 'system' had to accommodate kinship and 'tribe', and at times 'religion' as well. [1]

This increasing systematization of caste was intimately connected with the development of photography. As much of the effort of ethnological classification was directed by a search for 'scientific' precision, the recording of 'exact' images by photography logically complemented the compiling of statistical information. Insofar as different castes were conceived of as representing distinct racial types, a photograph of a 'typical' member of an ethnic group could be used to identify the precise characteristics, of physiognomy, dress, and manners, that defined the group as a whole. Although photography had been used to record the 'ethnic types' of India from the early 1850s, the first full-scale compilation was *The Peoples of India,* an eight-volume work of468 photographs published by the Government of India in 1868. Initially conceived by the governor-general, Lord Canning, and his wife as a collection of souvenirs for their own personal use, the work was transformed by the Mutiny of 1857, with its challenge to Britain's presumed knowledge of India, into an official project. Accurate information about India's peoples now mattered as never before.

Although *The Peoples of India,* like earlier collections, idiosyncratically mixed caste, varna, and occupational categories, and occasionally betrays what Christopher Pinney calls the 'moral preoccupations' of the reforming era, for the most part the work marked out a stage in the transformation of ethnological curiosity into 'a structured framework— the sort of "grid" to be found in museums and exhibitions—in which scientific theory and normalizing judgment

predominate.' In its initial request for photographs, for instance, the Foreign Department asked the provincial governments to supply likeness of 'characteristic specimens' of each tribe within their jurisdiction, and to include for each not only the 'peculiar characteristics of costume' but 'the exact tint of their complexion and eyes'. Nor did the photographs stand alone. Each was accompanied by a brief account of what purported to be that group's essential character. Gujars, for instance, were described as 'given to indiscriminate plunder in times of disturbance', while Banjaras had 'a reputation for perfect honesty'. (Consistency, however, was always elusive, for the Banjaras were later classified as a 'criminal' tribe. [2])

Those, above all the educated Indians, who rejected the notion of their country as an ethnographic 'museum', vigorously endeavoured to distance themselves from this collection. Shown the volumes in the India Office in 1869, Sayyid Ahmed Khan was horrified to see his countrymen portrayed as 'the equal of animals'. With considerable embarrassment, his son Sayyid Mahmud told an inquiring official that, while he was a Hindustani, he was 'not one of the aborigines'. What, Sayyid Ahmed reflected sadly, could the young English official on his way to India think 'after perusing this book and looking at its pictures, of the power or honour of the natives of India?' [3]

As time went on Indian ethnography asserted ever more rigorously its scientific claims. Its categories, embedded in censuses, gazetteers, and revenue records, became ever more closely tied to the administrative concerns of the colonial state. At the heart of this ethnography remained always the study of caste. As H.H. Risley pronounced with vigour, in his own account of *The People of India*, caste 'forms the cement that holds together the myriad units of Indian society'. Were its cohesive power withdrawn or its essential ideas relaxed, he continued, the change 'would be more than a revolution; it would resemble the withdrawal of some elemental force like gravitation or molecular attraction. Order would vanish and chaos would supervene.' [4]

Despite this general agreement on the centrality of caste as an organizing principle for Indian society, what caste actually consisted of remained always a source of controversy. Several ethnographers, among them J.C. Nesield and William Crooke, argued that castes were defined by the occupations pursued by their members. Others, most notably Risley, insisted on a physical basis for caste. In his view, by contrast to other areas such as Europe, where 'anthropometry has to confess itself hindered, if not baffled, by the constant intermixture of types obscuring and confusing the data ascertained by measurements', in India 'the process of fusion has long ago been arrested, and the degree of progress which it had made up to the point at which it ceased to operate is expressed in the physical characteristics of the groups which have been formed.' Caste, that is, like race, was immutably inscribed on the bodies of India's peoples, and could be ascertained, so Risley argued, by measuring the nasal index. If, he said, 'we take a series of castes . . . and arrange them in order of the average nasal index, so that the caste with the finest nose shall be at the top, and that with the coarsest at the bottom of the list, it will be found that this order substantially corresponds with the accepted order of social '[5]

While few were as confident as Risley of the explanatory value of particular measures such as the nasal index, most late-nineteenth-century ethnographers, in India as elsewhere, accepted the notion that anthropometric research had some value. Almost all measured skulls—if only, as in the case of Crooke, to contest Risley's more extravagant claims—took caste and photographs, and developed techniques of fingerprinting to identify criminals. In similar fashion, British ethnographers universally insisted that, whatever their defining characteristics, castes were discrete and distinct; and until after the First World War their mapping remained an enduring preoccupation. Nevertheless, despite the enthusiasm which drove forward the process of measurement, in administrative practice caste proved to be an awkward and unwieldy classificatory category. Even the mere enumeration of castes in the decennial census was a project of formidable difficulty. Constant efforts had to be made to reduce the bewildering array of caste names returned by individuals to a consistent

order, and to fit all enumerated individuals properly into the assigned categories. Nor was it a simple matter to devise systems of classification which could contain the vast array of caste data. [6]

Most controversial was the effort to arrange castes hierarchically by 'social precedence'. In the various provincial 'Castes and Tribes' volumes, the authors sidestepped this nettlesome question by arranging the entries alphabetically. The 1891 census made some effort within larger occupational categories to list groups in accordance with their 'social estimation', but the self-confident Risley, as census commissioner a decade later, determined to secure an accurate ranked listing. To aid his own research, and to ensure that his lists accorded with 'native public opinion', he even consulted a wide array of Indians. The prescriptions found in Sanskrit legal textbooks, together with the opinions of Brahmin pandits, shaped the responses of most of these informants; while the whole enterprise generated a vast outpouring of claims to higher status, especially among the members of middling castes such as Kayasthas and Khatris who felt entitled to rank as Ksatriya. Risley, however, had long since made up his own mind. What mattered was race. On the first page of the *Tribes and Castes of Bengal,* Risley illustrated a stone panel from the Buddhist stupa at Sanchi depicting three women at prayer in front of an altar. In the background 'four stately figures . . . of tall stature and regular features . . . look on with folded hands in apparent approval.' The whole shows us, as Risley interpreted the scene, the 'higher' Aryan race on friendly terms with the 'lower' Dravidian, but 'keenly conscious of the essential difference of type.' 'Race sentiment', he concluded, resting upon a 'foundation of fact which scientific methods confirm', at once 'shaped the intricate grouping of the caste system, and has preserved the Aryan type in comparative purity throughout Northern India.' [7]

The persistence of fragmented ethnic identities at the heart of Indian society, in the view of most British ethnographers, foreclosed any effective unity amongst the country's peoples. Risley certainly was in no doubt about the political implications of a racially based caste system. Because castes, he insisted, were in India so sharply demarcated from

each other, there existed 'no national type and no nation or even nationality in the ordinary sense of these words.' Risley nevertheless endeavoured to define a way by which India's castes could be reshaped so that they would play a role in the country's future political development. It may be said, he wrote, that the caste system 'with its singularly perfect communal organization, is a machinery admirably fitted for the diffusion of new ideas; that castes may in course of time group themselves into classes representing the different strata of society; and that India may thus attain, by the agency of these indigenous corporations, the results which have been arrived at elsewhere through the fusion of individual types.' The caste system, in this vision, could constitute a kind of civil society for India, which taught its peoples to work together. Ultimately, unlike the English language, confined to a tiny elite, caste might even help form a larger structure of shared values for the subcontinent. But Britain's presence would be needed for the foreseeable future to provide unity and leadership. In the end, of course, as the British patronage of caste helped embed it within Indian politics, Risley's vision found substantial realization in what has increasingly become independent India's caste-based political system. [8]

The valorization of caste difference as fixed and immutable found perhaps its most striking expression in the creation of the two opposed groups of 'criminal tribes' and 'martial races'. The notion that certain caste groups practised crime as a hereditary profession—that, as one British official wrote, 'crime is their trade and they are born to it and must commit it'—followed logically from the assumptions that sustained the British view of the caste system, and more generally of Indian society. As there existed those destined to be carpenters or cultivators, so too were there those 'destined by the usage of caste to commit crime and whose dependents will be offenders against the law.' Many of these so-called criminal tribes, furthermore, as wanderers and vagrants, were outside the normal networks of sedentary society; hence they were believed to challenge British efforts to order and control their Indian dominion. The outcome was the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871.

The notion that there existed groups in India predisposed to crime originated in the campaign against the thags during the 1830s. The thags, as we have seen, with their mysterious rituals of murder and worship directed to the goddess Kali, exerted a powerful fascination for the British, and so came to embody the 'mysterious' East. Inasmuch as thags were conceived of as being fundamentally different from ordinary criminals, W.H. Sleeman, as he set out to eradicate thagi, decided that no effort need be made to prove that a given individual had committed a particular crime. On the basis of thag genealogies which he put together, he argued that thagi was hereditary. Hence, it was sufficient for conviction to prove that an individual was a member of a thag gang. Although Sleeman successfully demonstrated the ability of the Raj to extirpate such gangs, largely through the use of informers' testimony, in the process the notion of distinct 'criminal communities', with its challenge to liberal ideas of individual responsibility and the procedural guarantees of the 'rule of law', became embedded in the legal framework of British India. [9]

In the wake of the 1857 uprising, the British determined to subdue all remaining low-status, wandering groups. Such concerns were not of course unique to India, for European governments had long been suspicious of gypsies and wandering vagabonds of all sorts. But for the Raj of the 1860s it was a matter of special urgency, as only a settled village society, wholly under the supervision of a conservative landed elite, could guarantee the British the security they required. In the process, the spectre of thagi was revived and blown up to ever greater proportions. As the inspector-general of the North-Western Provinces Police wrote in 1867, 'It must be remembered, in dealing with the wandering predatory tribes of India, that the fraternities are of such ancient creation, their number so vast, the country over which their depredations spread so vast, their organization so complete, and their evil of such formidable dimensions, that nothing but special legislation will suffice for their suppression and conversion.' Now, however, as part of the new ethnography, caste affiliation, not the fictive kinship of gang membership, defined collective criminality. The 1871 act listed four tribes as criminal, out of some twenty-nine proposed by the police, and

provided a mechanism through which additions could be, and were, made to their numbers in subsequent years. The members of such tribes were registered, and their movements restricted by a system of passes and roll-calls. Those found outside their prescribed place of residence were liable to arrest without a warrant. [10]

This effort to define specific 'criminal tribes' did not escape criticism. Several officials, among them the judges of the Punjab Chief Court, committed to the procedure of the ordinary criminal law, with its denial of Indian 'difference', urged that only individuals should be registered, and then restricted in their movements only when charged with crimes actually committed. Others pointed to the likelihood that such legislation would confound the innocent with the guilty, and might even drive those deprived of their customary livelihood to take up crime, as well as offering the police great opportunities for abuse of their power. Further, the avowed goal of reforming these criminals by settling them in special colonies under surveillance stood sharply at odds with the theory, underlying the act, of a hereditary predisposition to commit crime. Nevertheless, as time went on, the act was extended to include ever more 'tribals', and was finally repealed only after Independence.

The ideology sustaining the notion of 'criminal tribes' was not wholly a product of the colonial environment. Even in Victorian Britain the government feared the so-called 'dangerous' classes, who were conceived of as threatening public order. Hence in 1869, while discussions regarding the 1871 act were underway in India, the Habitual Criminals Act incorporated into English law exceptional powers for the surveillance and control of those denominated 'habitual offenders'. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, during the unsettled decades from Peterloo to Chartism, fear of the lower orders as inherently revolutionary was widespread among the members of 'respectable' society. By the 1860s, with the extension of the franchise, as we have seen, the regularly employed working class began to be brought into the constitution. There remained only the 'habitual offenders'. Conceived of as a separate criminal class, perhaps even

biological degenerates born to a life of crime, these men required a separate coercive apparatus for their control. Yet the category of the 'habitual offender' remained always sharply differentiated from its Indian counterpart. Despite the notion of a genetic predisposition to criminal behaviour, the English legislation encompassed only those already convicted of a crime, and never their children. It involved, that is, the identification of individuals, not the proscription of defined 'tribes'. Even the assertion that criminal behaviour was 'racially' grounded was far removed from the stigmatizing of everyone in a 'racial' group as a criminal. Despite the superficial similarity of the two enactments, the Indian Criminal Tribes act marked out a distinctively colonial ethnography. Even India's criminals were not similar to England's.

Incongruous though it might appear, the 1871 act included among the 'dangerous' classes not only the so-called criminal tribes, but eunuchs as well. James Fitzjames Stephen, as Law Member drafting the act, insisted that there existed 'an organized system of sodomitical prostitution, of which these wretches are the managers', and that no measure to force them to adopt 'honest pursuits' would be too severe. Although the subsequent discussion on the bill evoked much righteous indignation with regard to the eunuchs' alleged kidnapping and castration of children, what clearly disturbed the government as much is criminal behaviour, and what the act forbade was the practice of eunuchs appearing in public dressed in female attire. Everyone, so the act implied, had not only to adopt a settled livelihood, but to conform to accepted gender roles. Sexual ambiguity could no more be tolerated than a life of 'wandering without leave'. [11]

Far more consequential were India's 'martial races'. Although these groups never achieved full statutory definition, in the years after the Mutiny a perceived sense of a distinctive martial fitness came to distinguish various peoples of northern India from those elsewhere, above all in Bengal. This process was driven by the imperatives of the military, who sought an army organized 'with a view to the full development of race efficiency'. Inbred martial skill, as G.F. MacMunn wrote

in his definitive study of India's armies, defined one of the 'essential differences between the East and the West'. In the 'East' only certain clans and classes can bear arms; the others have not the physical courage necessary for the warrior's. In Europe, by contrast, 'every able-bodied man, given food and arms, is a fighting man of some sort', and hence capable of serving his country in time of war. [12]

Initially, as Clive and his successors recruited an army for the East India Company, considerations of racial ability mattered little. Many regiments, especially in the southern armies, accepted all recruits and intermixed them without concern for caste or religion. The Bengal Army after 1800 in large part confined its recruitment to the higher castes, above all Brahmins and Rajputs, whose customs the British took care to conserve, and it drew the bulk of its soldiery from rural Oudh and Bihar. Though the upper castes, regarded as generally superior within Indian society, might be presumed to be better soldiers, and though 'a fine physique and martial appearance' might gain an individual the attention of the recruiting officers, no attempt was made to portray the men of these castes or regions as inherently better suited than others for military service.

After 1857 the mutinous Bengal regiments were disbanded, and the recruiting grounds shifted to the north, to the area from Delhi across the Punjab to the frontier. Simultaneously, mixed regiments were largely abandoned in favour of those organized on a systematic grouping of men by 'race and sect and clan'. This transformation was not the result of any historical experience, apart from the Mutiny itself, not was it wholly a matter of tactical considerations of 'divide and rule'. Madrasis, Marathas, and the sepoys of the Bengal Army had fought well, both for the Company and against it, over the preceding half century; and even during the upheaval of 1857 the mixed regiments of the southern armies had remained loyal. As a result, following the recommendations of the Peel Commission in 1859, many officers argued for a mixture of castes within units in order to avert exclusive combinations that might once again lead to mutiny. Yet so compelling was the logic of 'martial

races' that by the 1880s almost the entire army was organized into units based on caste or ethnicity.

The notion of 'martial races' drew sustenance from a variety of elements in the cultural baggage of late Victorian England. As the Aryans had once conquered northern India, it was assumed that those races descended from them possessed superior military capabilities. The Dogras, isolated in the hills, for instance, were presumed to retain the 'old Aryan Hindu stock'. Other groups, such as the Afridis, with those cropped fair hair and blue eyes of a 'distinctly European appearance', could well, so MacMunn reasoned, have kept intact 'traces' of Alexander's Greek soldiers. Where race failed—for MacMunn acknowledged that most 'martial' groups had lost their distinguishing racial characteristics—environment supplied an alternate explanation. Their 'hardy, active, and alert life' in a land of cold winters and often rugged mountains had 'inured' these northern peoples to hardship and thus fitted them for military life. A presumed camaraderie along the frontier, which we shall soon discuss more fully, also mattered. As MacMunn wrote of the Pathans, 'to the best type of Englishman their open irresponsible manner and delight in all exercise and sport, with their constant high spirits, appeal greatly.' Whether defined by race, climate, or personality, 'martial races' were those who most closely resembled what the British imagined themselves to be. In similar fashion, 'martial races' existed in contrast to the Bengalis. Indeed, one might argue, the 'extraordinary effeminacy' of the Bengali, whom 'no necessity would induce to fight', alone gave meaning to the notion of 'martial races'. They were what the Bengali was not. [13]

In keeping with the larger principles informing the British idea of the caste system, each 'martial' race was conceived of as possessing its own distinctive set of characteristics—Jats, for instance, were 'pro-verbially thick in the uptake, but have served with distinction'—and these traits were all meticulously detailed in the various regimental recruiting handbooks. One group, however, that of the Sikhs, was not merely enrolled in the list of 'martial races', but came to predominate in the army, and in the process found their community transformed. As

Richard Fox has made clear in his study of the 'Lions of the Punjab', the British, from the very outset, determined that only 'pure' Sikhs should be recruited. The British 'laboured hard to ensure the religious conformity of the Sikh recruit', and not just to any version of Sikhism, but to what the British conceived was proper Sikh belief and practice. Potential recruits had to be baptised into the Sikh faith, while regimental commanders insisted upon a strict observance of those customs associated with reformed monotheistic Sikhism, among them unshorn hair, the wearing of the dagger and steel bangle, and taking the name of 'Singh', or lion. As MacMunn acknowledged, it was the 'British officer who has kept Sikhism up to its old [sir] standard.'

By distinguishing a select group of Sikhs in this way, the British believed they could keep Sikhism free of contamination by 'unorthodox' forms of Sikh belief and, more generally, by Hinduism. Sikhism, after all, as they saw it, was a religion distinct from Hinduism, and, as a monotheistic faith, superior. Hence, as one official wrote, 'with the relapse into Hinduism and readoption of its superstitious and vicious social customs, it is notorious that the Sikh loses much of his martial instincts and greatly deteriorates as a fighting soldier.' This 'colonially constituted Sikhism', as Fox describes it, was ostensibly marked out by religious belief, for in principle anyone could be baptised. Yet in practice it embodied British racial ideas as well. Only 'true' Sikhs, men of proper 'stock', which usually meant those of certain prescribed regions and classes, possessed the necessary martial skills; others, of lower-class background or recent conversion to the faith, were of inferior or 'deteriorated' stock, and so, with a few exceptions, such as the Mazhbis, were not recruited into the army. As the British endeavoured to put their ideology into practice, in the army as elsewhere the categories by which Indian society was ordered inevitably became confused. [14]

The British did not view Indian society only through the prism of race and caste. Descent, or 'tribal' affiliation, mattered as well. For the most part such genealogical connections were important insofar as they facilitated the resolution of disputes over landholding and inheritance

among individual families. Settlement officers, and the courts, needed to know the principles by which estates were to be apportioned among heirs or princely thrones awarded to claimants. In the Punjab, however, the British made kinship the organizing principle of the entire society. This reflected, in part, their perception that in a province with a Muslim majority, 'caste', as an inherently Hindu phenomenon, could not by its very nature appropriately order rural society. In part, too, the constitution of Punjabi society on a unique basis was a logical continuation of the 'Punjab school' style of governance, based on direct and personal rule, and with it the use of local customary law, rather than the Bengal regulations, with their Sanskritic uniformities, for the adjudication of disputes. This determination to rule, so far as possible, in accordance with indigenous principles gained further strength from the unsettling experience of the 1857 rising, from which the Punjab had for the most part been exempt. Many officials, indeed, attributed this fortuitous escape from rebellion to the province's unique system of rule. As the British in the 1860s and 1870s studied the organization of Punjab society, the 'native institution' they found at its heart, as C.L. Tupper argued, while preparing his compendium of 'Punjab Customary Law', was the 'tribe', which he defined as a patrilineal descent group encompassing those who preserved the memory of a common ancestor. The British set out accordingly to define and systematize this 'tribal system', and so build it into their own imperial order. In so doing, so they believed, they could not only present themselves as legitimate indigenous rulers, presiding over an unaltered 'traditional' society, but they could also harness the Punjab's distinctive social forms, above all in the settlement of canal colonies, to the creation of a prosperous land.

Much in this endeavour involved an effort at self-delusion, for tradition, once systematized and enforced as 'tradition' in the courts, defined a new mode of governance far different from that which had gone before. Furthermore, even though the notion of a 'tribally' based Punjab was self-consciously grounded in British perceptions of local practice, it did not wholly accord with the social realities it purported to describe. Structures of descent varied across the face of the Punjab, as they did elsewhere; while few of the so-called 'tribes', especially in the

central and eastern Punjab, had managed to preserve recognized traditions of leadership in the face of hostile Mughal and Sikh rulers. As a result, to provide an institutional footing for local leadership the British created the administrative unit of the *zail,* a grouping of five to forty villages found only in the Punjab. *Zaildars,* as heads of these local units, were meant to be simply existing leaders of locally dominant 'tribes' and 'clans', but in practice they were often created as the British sought to make Punjab society resemble the ideology that informed their conception of it. Nevertheless, by the end of the century, building upon existing patterns of contiguous settlement, grounded in bonds of solidarity among local kin groups, and reinforcing them where necessary by institutional means, the British had successfully brought into being a rural elite whose influence, as David Gilmartin argues, 'was tied to the "ideology" of imperial authority on which the British had built their regime.' [15]

The final stage in the creation of a distinctive 'tribal' Punjab took place with the creation of the category of 'agricultural tribes' in the Land Alienation Act of 1900. The problem of land alienation, or, more precisely, the sale of land for debts owed to moneylenders, perceived as 'outsiders' in village society, had long concerned the British, in the Deccan and the Gangetic valley as well as in the Punjab. Though recent research has brought into question the scale and character of such transfers, their existence forced upon the British at the time an agonizing choice between, on the one hand, the 'modernizing' ideology of an India transformed by the free working of natural economic l aws, which encouraged the transfer of property from the hands of 'unenterprising' owners, and, on the other, the ideal of a stable agrarian order kept in place by 'traditional' elites. In the Punjab there was little dissent from the notion that this strategic border province and recruiting ground for the army had to be preserved from agrarian upheaval. Hence, in a far-reaching assault on the privileges of those whom they saw as outsiders, the British prohibited the sale of land to anyone other than a member of a registered 'agricultural tribe'.

With the passage of the Land Alienation Act the British transformed the 'tribal' structure they had built up during the previous halfcentury. Grouped together into a single unit for the entire province, the 'agricultural tribes', as Gilmartin has pointed out, denoted no social reality, as each did to some degree in its own locality, but only a category which the British used to define who would have the right to own land, and hence the right to wield power within the colonial order. Despite its highly artificial character, however, the notion of 'agricultural tribes' soon took on a life of its own. Under the banner of the Land Alienation Act the province's rural elite, in cooperation with the British, successfully controlled Punjab politics throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Both the organization of the Unionist Party and the Punjabi response to Muslim nationalism before 1947, and even afterwards in Pakistan, demonstrated the enduring power of the ideology of a 'tribal' Punjab. No more than that of 'caste' could the notion of 'tribe' be contained within the colonial ideology that had originally shaped it.

Shaping Communities

Richard Westmacott's 1830 statue of Warren Hastings, now in the Victoria Memorial, shows him accompanied by two Indians, who flank him on either side, but stand well below the toga-clad imperial ruler. One of the flanking figures, a tall, classically proportioned Brahmin with a shaven head and topknot, represented Hinduism; the other, a seated *munshi* or scribe, bearded and turbaned, and gazing thoughtfully at a book, was meant to stand for India's Muslim peoples. Both figures, garbed as scholars, were treated respectfully, and so reflected Hastings' sympathetic view of India's culture and its religious traditions. Yet they also announced what was to be Britain's enduring insistence that India was divided into two religious communities—those of Hinduism and of Islam. [16]

Division of India's people into Hindu and Muslim was not of course new in Hastings' time. The earliest British travellers even in Mughal times had been struck by the distinctive characteristics of the adherents

of what they then called the 'Gentoo' faith. As Ralph Fitch, Queen Elizabeth's emissary to the emperor Akbar in 1584, wrote of the Hindus, 'They be the greatest idolators that I ever sawe.' Nor was his perception at all sympathetic; the idols, he declared, were 'blacke and evill favoured, their mouthes monstrous, their eares gilded, and full of jewels.' Such perceptions went back even further in time, to Marco Polo, who toured southern India, and to Alberuni and the medieval Muslim conquerors, as they contemplated the difference between themselves and those over whom they ruled. Yet the term 'Hindu', though of Perso-Arabic origin, was not used in Muslim texts to mark out a religion, but rather referred generally to the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent, the lands across the Indus river. Even when the term 'Hindu' was used to set off those adhering to a non-Islamic faith, the perception each group had of the other, as Romila Thapar has written, 'was not in terms of a monolithic religion, but more in terms of distinct and disparate castes and sects along a social continuum.' From the Indian, or Hindu, side, the Central Asian invaders were demonized, but, Sheldon Pollock has pointed out, as incarnations of the evil Ravana, or as Turks, not as Muslims. [17]

Only with the coming of British rule, from the late eighteenth century on, did the notion that there existed distinct 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' communities in India take on a fixed shape. In part this was simply a product of administrative convenience, as the British sought to devise comprehensive systems of law that would at once respect the customs of their new subjects and yet reduce them to a manageable order. It is altogether appropriate that Hastings, who set on foot the codification of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' law, should be commemorated by a statue showing him with a Brahmin pandit and a Muslim munshi. Yet from the outset distinctions of religion were seen as shaping those of character. Dow and Orme, as we have seen, had defined the basic differences demarcating the two religious groupings: Muslims were violent, despotic, masculine; Hindus were indolent, passive, effeminate. One fought by the sword; the other by cunning and litigation. However much William Jones and James Mill may have disagreed in evaluating the accomplishments of India's peoples, together they accepted without

question their division into Hindu and Muslim. By the early nineteenth century authoritative conceptions of the two faiths, and the character of their adherents, had been set firmly in place.

More importantly, the British came to believe that adherence to one or the other of these two religions was not merely a matter of belief, but defined membership more generally in a larger community. To be Hindu or Muslim by itself explained much of the way Indians acted. Riotous behaviour, for instance, no matter what its actual character, as Gyanendra Pandey has made clear in his account of British reportage on riots in Banares, was often made to express enduring antagonisms between two opposed and self-contained communities. [18] In early-nineteenth-century Britain too, of course, religious affiliation mattered intensely. Anglicans, Dissenters, and Catholics, from the time of the Reformation onward, had been set apart from each other by Sabbath observance, attitudes to liquor, marriage networks, and education, with each community maintaining its own school. Until well into the nineteenth century the state awarded the right to vote on the basis of religious affiliation, and even the 1870 act, which committed the state to support of education, authorized only the disbursal of funds to religious bodies. Yet, however much religion may have informed British life, it was never imagined, apart from the exceptional case of Ireland, as having the power to shape the entire society into opposed 'communities'. Symptomatic perhaps of the difference was the prominence given to religious affiliation as a 'fundamental category' in the Indian census, while in Britain the census, apart from one survey in 1851, never recorded data on religion. The centrality of religious community, along with that of caste, for the British marked out India's distinctive status as a fundamentally different land.

British 'understanding' of Hinduism, unlike that of Islam, developed only with the discoveries of the Oriental scholars in the late eighteenth century. Whereas Europeans had since medieval times created a rich descriptive tradition for Islam, perceived as an enemy and an alternate religious system known from bitter experience, Hinduism long remained obscure, a mysterious faith of 'idols' and 'monstrosities'.

Furthermore, as the British scrambled to understand Hinduism, they created for that religious system a degree of coherence that it had not possessed before. Indeed, one might almost say, by imposing their 'knowledge' upon it, the British made of Hinduism, previously a loosely integrated collection of sects, something resembling a religion—although, as they saw it, a religion that was not a 'proper' religion. To the present day, scholars of religion still remain at odds over the extent to which the Hinduism of pre-colonial India can be described as a 'religion', with an orthodoxy that defines the faith of a set of believers, as distinct from a set of beliefs and practices embedded in India's larger social order.

Initially, the British sought an organizing principle for Hinduism in the Brahmin community. As the highest caste, as priests, and, in Jones's time, as collaborators in the study of the ancient Sanskrit texts, Brahmins were naturally perceived as the focal point of the faith, and with it of the Hindu community. Ever since Fitch's time commentators had singled out for notice the habits and customs of the Brahmins, whether their wearing of the sacred thread or, as Fitch announced, that they 'eat no flesh, nor kill any thing; they live of rice, butter, milke, and fruits.' For James Mill, the Brahmins, creators of the caste system, were a primary cause of the country's 'degradation'. 'By a system of priestcraft', he wrote, 'built upon the most enormous and tormenting superstition that ever harassed and degraded any portion of mankind', the minds of the Hindus 'were enchained more intolerably than their bodies'. In all such descriptions of Hinduism, Victorian commentators, steeped in Protestantism, turned inevitably to Catholicism, with its practices ranging from 'popery' to saint worship, as providing a European parallel, and an appropriate vocabulary through which the Hindu faith might be understood.

As time went on Europeans extended and refined their knowledge of the texts that embodied the Hindu faith. Much of this was the work of German Indological scholars, from the philosopher Hegel and the Romantic idealist Friedrich Schlegel to the Sanskritist Max Müller. Together these men fitted India's ancient philosophical texts into a larger vision in which, as Ronald Inden has indicated, Mill's 'more or

less disconnected examples of Hindu irrationality and superstition' gave way to a view of Hinduism as a system of 'dream-like knowledge' dominated by a 'creative imagination'. These German scholars did not, of course, construct their philosophical systems with the aim of advancing the administrative objectives of the Raj. Nevertheless, as their worldview made of the Indian mind, 'imaginative and passionate', a foil for Christian and Western 'rationality', it necessarily carried with it the assumption that the Hindus, unable to supply this element themselves, required an externally imposed 'rationality' to order their day-to-day lives. Hence, Germanic Indology, though never directly a part of the ideology of the Raj, by creating a coherent vision of the 'Hindu mind' that at once incorporated it into a larger ordering of the world and yet subordinated it to the West, played a critical role in sustaining the intellectual assumptions that bulwarked Britain's Indian Empire. The vision of a 'spiritual' India, in contrast to a 'materialist' West, was never incompatible with the existence of the Raj. [19]

Simultaneously, during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the British in India endeavoured to come to terms with the variety of Hindu religious experience they were encountering on the ground. The attempt to comprehend contemporary Hinduism was, however, a frustrating enterprise. Alfred Lyall, one of the more careful students of Indian religion in the government, came close to throwing up his hands in despair. We can scarcely comprehend, he wrote, 'an ancient religion, still alive and powerful, which is a mere troubled sea, without shore or visible horizon, driven to and fro by the winds of boundless credulity and grotesque invention.' The range and diversity of worship, with beliefs undergoing 'constant changes of shape and colour' within an 'extraordinary fecundity of superstitious sentiment', made Hindu India, in his view, unlike anywhere else in the world. [20]

The British sought to make sense of this 'religious chaos' in two ways. First, rather like Maine's account of the village community, the British saw in Hinduism a 'survival' of the ancient world. Even Mill had argued that, 'by conversing with the Hindus of the present day, we, in some measure, converse with the Chaldeans and Babylonians of the time of

Cyrus; with the Persians and Egyptians of the time of Alexander.' For Lyall the popular Hinduism of his day was very similar to the polytheism of the Roman Empire. Indeed, he wrote, 'We perceive more clearly what classic polytheism was by realizing what Hinduism actually is.' The second strategy was to insist upon the centrality of 'Brahmanism' as the historic core of the Hindu faith, and to regard so-called popular, or devotional, Hinduism as a 'whole vegetation of cognate beliefs sprouting up in every stage of growth beneath the shadow of the great orthodox traditions and allegories of Brahmanism.'

But why had Hinduism not progressed beyond ancient polytheism to a 'true' monotheism? To some extent, men like Lyall found an answer in the absence of a central ecclesiastical structure capable of disciplining popular practice. But for a larger explanation the British turned to Aryan racial theory. Popular Hinduism, in this view, was the inevitable outcome of the settling of the Aryan invader in a tropical land, where his 'pure' faith became mixed with the fertility cults and superstitions of the subcontinent's aboriginal peoples. Contemporary Hinduism was, as the Sanskrit scholar Monier-Williams described it, using the metaphor of the jungle, 'Brahminism has run to seed and spread out into a confused tangle of divine personalities and incarnations. The one system is the rank and luxuriant outcome of the other.' Lyall in similar terms compared religious practice in India to the 'entangled confusion of a primeval forest, where one sees trees of all kinds, ages, and sizes interlacing and contending with each other.' Above the tree tops a 'glimpse of blue sky' symbolized the 'illimitable transcendental ideas' of Brahmanic speculation above and apart from earth-born conceptions. India's essential Dravidianism, its 'femininity', and its popular Hinduism, were all the same and interchangeable; and together debarred forever any recovery of its former Aryan self. [21]

Such attempts at ordering Hinduism achieved only a partial success. Even Lyall's detailed account of the 'religion of an Indian province', that of Berar, where he had served in the 1860s, though it served as a model for subsequent studies of popular Hinduism, did little more than catalogue some eleven modes of religious practice, ranging from the

worship of stones and animals to that of deceased persons and local heroes. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, with the Brahmins as collaborators, and the ancient texts to guide them, the British, and subsequently the German Indologists, had constructed a coherent notion of Hinduism, and of a Hindu community, that took shape in the codes of Hindu personal law. A century later, their knowledge of Hinduism no longer confined to a tidy set of texts, the British instead found themselves confronted with Lyall's 'tangled jungle of disorderly superstitions'. In such circumstances, to deploy the term 'Hindu', even as an overarching category, was always difficult. The decennial censuses, which from 1881 onward marshalled the members of India's religions into 'communities', mapped, counted, and above all, as Kenneth Jones has noted, compared each with its rivals. Yet, even so, the category 'Hindu' remained exceptionally elusive. As the Punjab census commissioner reported in 1881, 'Every native who was unable to define his creed, or who described it by any other name than that of some recognized religion . . . was held to be and classed as a Hindu.' [22]

In many ways it suited British purposes not to press forward too vigorously with the consolidation of Hinduism. The adherence of that faith, after all, a majority of India's population, if accorded an autonomous sense of identity, posed a potentially menacing alternative to the Raj. The British thus turned instead to local custom and caste as more useful categories through which to make sense of Indian society. Though the codes of Hindu law still embodied the ideology of Hastings' time, more localized identities informed much of legal and administrative practice outside Bengal. This process was perhaps most visibly manifested in the recording and codification of Punjab customary law. Here overarching religious identities, whether of Hinduism or Islam, as we have seen, were set aside in favour of principles drawn from the secular ordering of kin and clan. Caste, in particular, was convenient, for it afforded (or so the British thought) a precise way of knowing, and so controlling, Indian society at the local level, and it could be seen in any case as incorporating much that was distinctive about Hinduism. With the rare exception of such reformist groups as the Brahmo and Arya Samaj, seen as hopeful portents of a

'purer' faith, the late-nineteenth-century ethnographic enterprise was based upon caste, rather than sect. In many reports and statistical tables a commonly used heading was 'Caste if Hindu, otherwise religion'. The shaping of a compelling sense of 'Hindu' identity was to be a product only of the twentieth century, and the work of Hindus themselves.

Islam, by contrast, possessed for the British (if not always for its adherents) an established coherence. The long and intimate connections of Islam with Europe, from the time of the Crusades onward, had provided Europeans with an assured sense of 'knowing' Islam, and Muslims, that did not exist as they endeavoured to understand Hindus and Hinduism. As James Mill noted, 'With the state of civilization in Persia the instructed part of European readers are pretty familiar.' This contrasted sharply with the 'mysterious, and little known' state of civilization among the Hindus. One might argue that in India two different Orientalist discourses met: one derived from the European encounter with the Muslim Middle East, the other an attempt to describe distant Asian lands where a tropical climate shaped passive and effeminate peoples. Insofar as India's pre-colonial states were frequently constituted as Islamic polities, and Muslims provided the dominant elite within them, it was easy to project the stereotypes constructed in the Middle East upon India's Muslims. In so doing, Muslims were inevitably distinguished sharply from their Hindu neighbours, and included within the alternate set of Orientalist notions of the 'East'. Shaped by these two contrasting discourses, the two communities found themselves counterposed, at first imaginatively and then in the strife of 'communalism', one against the other. [23]

5

Social Categories and Colonization in Panjab, 1849-1920 *

Brian P. Caton

> Occasional divergences would, of course, have to be provided in dealing with a law affecting diverse tribes and races, as it may be conceded that Voltaire only expresses a commonplace truth when he observes 'that the more vast a State is in size and composed of different peoples, the more difficult it becomes to unite all together by one and the same jurisprudence.' To some extent this remark of the French Historian is applicable to a large Indian Province like the Punjab and I do not deny—in fact, I have fully experienced—the difficulty to which he alludes. [1]

Writing in 1880 in the preface of what became the first of several editions of his *Digest of Civil Law in the Punjab,* W.H. Rattigan expressed a point of view familiar to local and provincial administrators yet apparently lost to many discussions carried out at the all-India level. Rattigan, even then a veteran of the relatively young High Court of Lahore, had to administer civil jus- ice based on a set of assumptions about social categories in Panjab derived from the British experience of 1857. Although Orientalists and British administrators by 1858 had conceptualized Indian society as fundamentally religious, members of the Punjab

Commission believed that Panjabis were measurably different from the rest of India on religious questions; in a draft of the memorandum of record of the disturbances in 1857—8, Richard Temple claimed that 'the Punjabees are not so ticklish & bigoted about caste & religion as Hindoostanees'. [2] By the end of the nineteenth century, at least, many British officials had concluded that caste, as enunciated in documents, or by Brahmans from Gangetic India, did not exist in Panjab. Some officials attributed this to Panjabis' ignorance of or distaste for the sort of legalistic traditions of urbanized Company informants of the eighteenth century. [3] However, some officials continued to use the term 'caste' in both government and ethnographic texts, most famously Denzil Ibbetson in his 1881 report on the Punjab Census. [4] While this divergence suggests that the British colonial presence in India was hardly monolithic, more importantly it begs a question about social categories, and caste in particular. Differences among administrators appeared because the social and political conditions in which caste emerged varied across regions, and often within regions. Textual and administrative representations of caste continually changed in response to the widely varying political agenda of highly fragmented British and local populations seeking to maximize their control of property.

The term 'caste' has had a lively existence, quite separate from concerns of property. In the British view, reproduced quite clearly in Ibbetson's treatise, the presence and strength of caste as a system correlated directly with the presence of 'Brahminical Hinduism' signified by standard Orientalist clichés regarding 'irksome' social restrictions and 'degraded idolatry'. [5] Religion had something to do with caste, as Europeans were careful not to deploy 'caste' in their descriptions of Muslim social categories in India. However, Ibbetson's use of the modifier 'Brahminical' suggests a more inclusive definition of 'Hinduism', and therefore negates a simple congruence of caste and Hinduism. Widespread administrative application of caste to a limited reading of 'Hinduism' accompanied a relative profusion of terms to describe social categories outside of 'caste', of which 'tribe' became the most prominent by the middle of the nineteenth century. Colonial

authors, at least in northern and central India, frequently linked the evolutionary 'primitiveness' of tribes to their physical distance from settled societies or to their spatial mobility. [6] In the administrative discourse of the nineteenth century, the distinction between caste and tribe signified the breach between settled and unsettled, controlled and uncontrolled, possessing and not possessing property in land. In Panjab, as the provincial government struggled to extend its control over uncultivated territory and to turn 'loyal' Panjabis into the coercive arm of the state in the rest of India, 'tribe' became a more flexible term: some tribes became officially criminal in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and other tribes became officially agricultural, possessed of property, status, and power. British social engineering programmes in Panjab depended on Panjabis to provide the terms for their operation; Panjabi responsiveness to the material rewards of British programmes produced increasing flexibility in the definition of the social categories administrators sought to define more narrowly, yielding an historically evolving discourse through which Panjabis and government struggled to secure control over property and social order.

Social Categories and Power before Annexation

Obviously some form of social organization predated the British interest in and annexation of Panjab in 1849, and whatever forms scholars can discern appear to have been grounded in genealogy, that is, the notion that blood relations and affinal relations create bonds of loyalty or obligation that regulate the social actions of individuals. Such genealogical forms populate histories across northern India and across multiple chronological periods. For ancient India Romila Thapar has applied the term 'lineage group' to describe 'a corporate group of unilineal kin with a formalized system of authority'. [7] While one could contest the degree of formality of a lineage group's 'system of authority' or question the existence of actual kin relations among lineage group members, the language of genealogy remained central to social reckoning. For Thapar's 'lineage groups', authority emerged from the construction of genealogies, normally composed of two parts. The 'fixed tradition' consisted of succession lists or lists of descent groups; it was

perhaps only slightly more consistent over time than the 'narrative tradition', which consisted of legends or incidents in the lives of the major figures in the genealogy. [8] Sanskritic genealogies usually reached back to the sun or moon, providing the divine legitimation rulers habitually sought. Genealogical links could be telescoped legitimately in order to abridge uncertainties and to legitimize de facto exertion of power. This flexibility of genealogical claims to legitimize rule continued through the medieval period of Indian history, particularly in the notion of 'Rajputhood' that became most popular in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Dirk Kolff has contended that '"Afghan" as well as "Rajput" were soldiers' identities' rather than ethnic or genealogical designations. [9] Kolff's usage of 'genealogical' here implied the existence of actual bloodlines, meaning soldiers from any sort of family could make a genealogical claim to a putative Afghan or Rajput ancestor without much challenge. Rulers made claims of right to rule with little difficulty, but they waged a constant struggle to actually exercise rule and thereby maintain social status. In addition to engaging in an economy of public consumption *(dana),* a broker of military labour, that is, a lineage head, proclaimed his status as a 'Rajput' by engaging in a series of matrimonial alliances with families both more and less powerful than he. [10] This model of legitimizing behaviour comes quite close to David Gilmartin's view of the colonial-era *'biraden* as 'essentially transactional'. In both medieval and colonial cases, leadership may have been formally acknowledged in a *'biraderi* council' or through genealogical maps, but formal recognition was not required as long as the transactions of rule successfully occurred. [11] Lineages maintained their relevance as modes of social organization and political legitimation precisely because of their flexibility. Scholars cannot read a premodern genealogical claim at face value, but they equally must keep in mind that at specific points in time some people believed these claims to be statements of fact. The more powerful a ruler was on the ground, the more likely was his genealogical claim to be believed.

The relationship between the exertion of power and textual claims of right to rule must colour analyses of Panjab on the eve of British

annexation, and particularly of the two terms *misl* and *qaum,* which appear most frequently in descriptions of social categories of this period. In English language texts, the term *misl* appeared first in late-eighteenth-century travelogues and nineteenth-century histories of the rise of Ranjit Singh, ruler of Lahore from 1799 to 1839. The social formation that *misl* described emerged only in the context of local resistance to the last expeditions of Ahmad Shah Durrani in 1760, and accordingly the term does not appear with its social connotation in Panjabi texts before that date. The English accounts describe *misls* as political formations in which members were 'equal' partners, and as having been a natural extension of Sikh egalitarianism; a noteworthy exception appeared in W.G. Osborne's narration of resistance to Ahmad Shah Durrani's expeditions in the 1750s: 'The Sikh *chiefs* had been followed to the field by *relations* or volunteers, and not by hired retainers; they considered themselves as partners or associates in each separate enterprise, and regarded the lands acquired as common property, in which each had a share according to the degree in which he had contributed to the acquisition . . .' [12] More modern scholarship has only begun to challenge the Sikh egalitarian meaning of *misl* established in the nineteenth century. J.S. Grewal, in his contribution to the *New Cambridge History of India,* asserted cryptically that 'the ties of kinship among other things' became the basis for the formation of misls. [13] Veena Sachdeva argued that the term *misl* had no consistent usage in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and that *misls* could not be treated as cohesive political units in the way that narratives of Sikh history have done to date. Sachdeva's close examination of the Bhangi *misl* illustrated the ephemeral and voluntary character of political associations in the eighteenth century, and her treatment of the Nakkai *misl* is particularly telling. The Nakkais were actually two families, based in the towns of Gugera and Bharwal, who appear never to have cooperated for political ends and in fact often fought against each other; the term 'Nakkai' appears simply to refer to the region (Nakka) in which these two families operated. [14] The point to be drawn from Sachdeva's work is that a group of people, usually Sikh, may or may not have deployed a *misl* name to describe their operative group in order to

justify or legitimize a particular action of that group. In other words, a *misl* was normally a temporary combination of corroborated claims of descent, for example that Ranjit Singh was a son of Maha Singh, and of inter-family alliance, as in Ranjit Singh's Sukarchakia *misl* or the so-called Phulkian *misl* which constituted the princely families under the protection of the East India Company between 1809 and 1849. However, the ephemeral nature of the term's contemporary use and Ranjit Singh's elimination of the *misls* should not weaken the social relevance of the term to the people of northern and eastern Panjab in the eighteenth century; the rule of Ranjit Singh and the events culminating in annexation required Panjabis to deploy other more useful social categories.

The second term, *qaum,* while having a much longer lifespan than *misl*, has proven more flexible in its application. Dictionary compilers of the turn of the twentieth century clearly identified the term's Arabic origins, but in dictionaries of both Persian and Urdu *qaum* and its plural, *aqwam,* include 'caste' or 'castes' among the wide variety of English glosses: people, nation, tribe, family, race. [15] Certainly, these dictionary entries are products of their time rather than inputs; they follow, almost word for word, the efforts of Census Bureau officials to come to grips with indigenous terminology for social categories, as discussed below. Examining the contextual usage of *qaum* more clearly illuminates earlier usages, and for south-western Panjab the most useful text is *Tarikh-e-Jhang Sial.* [16] George Hamilton, while serving as Deputy Commissioner of Jhang District in the 1850s, commissioned this work, with which he intended to provide some insight into the political organization of the men who were the primary power brokers in his district. The author, Maulvi Nur Sial, focused on the succession of 'true' *(riasat)* of his own genealogical thread (the Jalalkhanana) over Jhang District from its centre of power, Jhang town. Nur Sial's elision of 'Jalalkhanana' and 'Sial' raises some concerns about the reliability of the text given its contemporary agenda; however, the inclusion of expansive, albeit incomplete, genealogical trees *(naqsha-e-nasabnama)* and attention to stories of origin provide the contextual content for examining the use of *qaum.* The beginning of the text introduces the

phrase *qaum-e-Sial,* referring to the family of the patronymic ancestor Rai Sial, who purportedly migrated from Jaunpur to southwestern Panjab in the thirteenth century. Rai Sial had three sons, Bharmi, Kohli, and Mahni, whose descendants appear in the text as, in the first of the three cases, *qaum-e-Bharmi* or, more frequently, *aqwam- e-Bharmi,* referring to the large number of genealogical groups linked to this ancestor. Each of the *aqwam-e-Bharmi,* to follow our example, had its own patronymic ancestor, usually located between the eighth and thirteenth generation removed from Rai Sial. The names of these *aqwam-e-Bharmi* were generated from the addition of the suffix 'ana' to the name of the later ancestor; for example, the descendants of Fattu were called Fattuana, from Mukhta Mukhtiana, from Raja Rajana, and so on; yielding well over a hundred *aqwam* linked to Rai Sial. [17] The text then suggests at least three uses of *qaum:* first, the largest possible genealogical unit, 'Sial'; second, a smaller genealogical unit, much greater in number, and with more immediate political relevance; and third, the three groups of *aqwam* attached to the three sons of Rai Sial. The narrative of the Jalalkhananas as presented in the text shows how factions could develop along sibling or agnatic lines, although these factions were rarely if ever called *aqwami.* The term *qaum* could describe many, but not all, of the units of political organization that appeared surreptitiously in south-western Panjab in at least the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries, if not earlier.

Examining the case of a single *qaum* illustrates more clearly the relationship between local and regional power and begins to expose the changes brought about through the colonization process. The Kharal *qaum* organized themselves into two groups of families, Upera and Lakhera, of animal herders operating in the lower Bari Doab; they frequently clashed with each other and with their neighbours, the Sikh Nakkai families. Sources discussing Kharals in detail put the number of subdivisions of the two groups between two and five, none of which appear to have cooperated for political ends. [18] The more important group politically were the Lakheras, primarily because of their maintenance of control over the town of Kamalia, named after a fourteenth-century Lakhera Khan, and its hinterland. Kamalia was an

important commercial centre for grain harvested in the lower Ravi valley, and also served as a stopping place for longdistance trade passing between Jhang and Pakpattan. During the rule of Ranjit Singh the Nakkai Sikhs seriously weakened the power of the Lakheras in the lower Ravi valley, and it should not be so surprising to find that in October 1847 the head of the Lakheras, Sarfaraz Khan, rode as far as Pindi Bhattian to meet A.H. Cocks, the representative of the Resident at Lahore who was scheduled to make the first British observations of villages in the lower Ravi in January 1848. [19] Under British rule Sarfaraz Khan became a fairly substantial landowner, in some cases graciously consenting to pay the revenue of villages which would not agree to the settlement officer's contract. [20] By the time the lower Chenab Canal reached the vicinity of Kamalia, the Lakheras were almost entirely landowners and therefore had access to canal colony land. The Uperas, on the other hand, had chosen to maintain residences in the *bar* and to not extend the boundaries of their 'property' at settlement; more property meant payment of more land revenue and responsibility for tracking stolen cattle in a greater area. Therefore, when the canal opened in the 1890s, government granted Uperas land as *janglis,* a status which became profitable only after the Uperas had proven themselves to be frugal and efficient cultivators (as discussed below). [21] The Kharal case illustrates two key points. By acting ordinarily in the role of the head of a 'ruling lineage', or to use Nur Sial's term, as a *ra'is,* Sarfaraz Khan negotiated for himself, and by extension for his lineage, a secure place in the regional accumulation of political micro-processes that we call British rule in Panjab. Also, the crucial micro-processes were those that transformed Sarfaraz Khan from *ra'is* to landlord.

The social groups represented by the terms *misl* and *qaum* exercised a certain degree of power at the local level, but in the early nineteenth century they operated, perhaps not for the first time, under the shadow of a larger political presence. As referred to earlier, Ranjit Singh coopted (as in the case of Fateh Singh Ahluwalia) or destroyed (as in the case of the Bhangis) the *misldars* and lineage heads who could have challenged

his legitimacy as ruler in the north of Panjab. In the south, where the population were less competitors than potential subjects, cooptation was unnecessary as long as lineage heads paid their 'taxes', which often amounted to an irregularly collected payment. For the local notable, the payment of revenue meant a temporary reprieve from Ranjit Singh's demands for cash; for Ranjit Singh, the payment indicated submission to the throne. For example, court reports from Lahore referred to Muzaffar Khan, and later Sarfaraz Khan, as the 'Nizam of Multan' when revenue was about to be paid, and as 'Nawab' when Multan exercised independence from Lahore. [22] Ahmad Khan Sial of Jhang (of the Jalalkhanana *qaum)* posed an exceptional case. While the notables of northern Panjab appeared regularly at the court of Ranjit Singh, and the Nawabs of Multan, Mankera, and other outlying areas never appeared in person, Ahmad Khan appeared sporadically. Between 1808 and 1815, Ahmad Khan was responsible for paying the revenue of Jhang to Lahore; after 1816, Ranjit Singh awarded the revenue contract to others, usually Lahori subordinates. In 1816 though, Ranjit Singh demanded Rs 100,000 from Ahmad Khan, even though he had formally separated Ahmad Khan from revenue collection, meaning that Ranjit Singh began to view Ahmad Khan as a military retainer rather than a conquered notable. [23] The ability of these individuals to pay Lahore's demand suggested the local limits of their power, but the nature and frequency of their interaction with the court demonstrated the fluidity of their political subordination. British rule did not change this principle of political fluidity, but it restricted political claims to the local level and in the language of property.

Creating Property and Elites during Colonization

From the beginning of British rule in Panjab, property generated political status. Archival records indicate that in the years immediately following annexation, the hangers-on of the Lahore court, demobilized soldiers, and their successors generated a flood of claims to jagirs and pensions; the quick rulings overwhelmingly denying or diminishing the amounts of these claims proved to Panjabis that mere association with the court or service in the military were no longer sufficient to produce

political status. [24] Instead, John Lawrence, as chief commissioner, intended the social landscape-clearing policies of the 1850s to replace courtly elites with landowning yeomanry and peasantry. [25] However, the rebellions of 1857 elicited a dramatic change of policy. As Andrew Major has argued, the British government sought to create a class of notables who were sufficiently elite, and who could ensure 'law and order' while crown rule extended over Panjab. [26] The requirement of sufficient nobility led Robert Montgomery, then Lieutenant Governor of Panjab, to commission Lepel Griffin to record the lineage history of those currently befriended by the government, a document which ended up being published as 'Punjab Chiefs' in 1865. Griffin's explicit intent was to document 'the Punjab aristocracy as it exists at the present day', including narratives only of those men 'who possess, at the present time, rank, wealth or local influence'. Griffin's volume covered the aristocracy between the Beas and the Indus rivers, and his plan to cover the rest of the province was fulfilled in part with the 1870 publication of 'Rajas of the Punjab' and with C.F. Massy's *Chiefs and Families of Note in the Punjab* in 1890. In the same year Massy edited a new edition of 'Punjab Chiefs' in which the narratives in the first edition were extended up to the date of publication, rather than entirely revised to account for the changes in families' fortunes in the intervening quarter century. In 1907 Charles Rivaz ordered W.L. Conran to bring both Griffin's and Massy's work up to date, and H.D. Craik finished this work in 1909 after Conran's illness. However, Conran and Craik did change the lineup of families in the two texts, now integrated into a single work, prompting numerous applications for inclusion in the new edition from families previously undocumented. Conran and Craik evaluated these applications with the assistance of a Committee of the Punjab Chiefs' Association, meaning that the government, by the instrument of demi-official publications, had created an aristocracy which was, in Marx's terms, not merely in itself but for itself. [27]

While 'Punjab Chiefs' was in the process of unofficially gazetting the uppermost crust of indigenous elite, administrators at the local level used a variety of official methods to construct a network of petty

notables and landowners loyal to the colonial state. In the colonial regime, a *ra'is* could invoke not only the language of ownership to exercise control over territory but also the language of lease, specifically the right to engage in rain-fed cultivation on designated plots of government-owned land. The government made such *bar barani* leases usually for one to three years, but often it repeatedly leased the same plots to the same people, creating a de facto ownership that could be revoked at the discretion of government. Malik Machia Langrial, along with Ghulam Muhammad Daulatanna and Ghulam Qadir Khan Khakwani, formed in 1882 what one officer called 'a chain of able and loyal zamindars, stretching down the whole way from Sarai Sidhu to the Sutlej.' [28] By 1891, however, the government considered awarding Machia's lease to another lessee and offering as compensation the lease of a different plot of land which could have been converted to title if Machia put it under perennial cultivation. [29] Local administrators had cast some doubt on Machia's willingness or ability to check cattle theft in the territory of his lease; such dubious loyalty could not and in the end did not go unpunished. [30] But note that the conversion of lease to title, the real measure of power, depended upon cultivation and, implicitly, settlement. Machia's claim to nobility meant little if he was unwilling to participate in the local government's agenda regarding the use of property.

The case of Dhara Singh, of the Gugera Nakkai family, provides another example of status becoming grounded in entitlement. During the rule of Ranjit Singh, Dhara Singh held in jagir land worth Rs 3250 per annum. He raised a small force against the British army in 1846, and as punishment the British government resumed his jagir and paid him as compensation a pension of Rs 300 per annum. [31] Dhara Singh personally attended the Deputy Commissioner of Gugera during the Gugera uprising in 1857—8, fighting against many of the insurgents, providing testimony against those apprehended, and aiding the Deputy Commissioner 'materially'. [32] Dhara Singh apparently proposed that his service be rewarded with the reassignment of his jagir, but the greater part of his jagir (Rs 3000 of Rs 3200) consisted of the town of Gugera

which the British were using as a civil station. The government of course could not approve Dhara Singh's proposal, but they doubled his pension, making it in perpetuity as well, and assigned him title to the two villages that accounted for the Rs 200 remaining of his old jagir. In theory, the rising value of land, especially land under cultivation, in the British property regime would make Dhara Singh and his family moderately wealthy and in high esteem in the eyes of the state. [33]

Although the government did transform individuals into land-owners, members of the Punjab Commission believed that the title of an individual was nested in a set of family relationships, especially as the post-1857 push to create a class of loyal notables confronted questions of succession and inheritance. In the United Provinces and in Panjab, British officials under the influence of the teachings of Henry Maine increasingly associated agrarian order with selfcontained village communities, and especially with communities run by single lineages. [34] C.L. Tupper, the most important compiler of customary law in Panjab, contended that 'communal' or lineage rights would inevitably take precedence over those of an individual or a nuclear family. [35] Property in land could not escape the community without endangering its existence and, therefore, the stability of the agrarian economy. In fact, Tupper argued that the British system of law inherently promoted the emergence of individual interest in property, and therefore the British government was obligated to design a legal system in Panjab which promoted communal or joint ownership. [36] Formal codification of customary law began in the 1870s, but informal codification in the form of judicial precedent had begun with cases heard by magistrates, district officers, and settlement officers immediately following annexation. Administrators limited formal codification by geographic as well as lineage boundaries, so that, for example, 'Muhammadan Jats' of the central districts of Panjab were governed by customary law, but those in the western parts of the province could be governed by religious law. [37] Formal codification involved an administrator filling out a survey form in the presence of the elders of the lineage group under study. This procedure often raised questions that lineage elders

had never considered, and many recorded 'customs' in fact had no precedent. [38] Genealogies began to be submitted as evidence in civil cases, and magistrates found themselves having to consider the merits of conflicting genealogies. [39] Complaints even challenged the codified customary law, in one case appealing the decision of a local magistrate who had actually written the code at the district's most recent settlement. [40] Although Panjabis hotly contested the human content of lineages and the rules by which they were governed, the codes and court reporters from the 1880s onward suggest that both British and Panjabis recognized lineages as the foundation of arguments over transmission and mutation of property.

Translating Panjab through the Census

The increasing social and political importance of genealogical groups in the middle of the nineteenth century forced administrators to lay down more precise boundaries between these groups and to explain the nature of these boundaries. To be fair, the government sought to allow Panjabis to identify themselves using their own categories, and this process resulted in the Census of 1881. Two smaller and less detailed censuses in 1855 and 1868 provided crude figures for the government of Panjab. But these two did not distinguish the population beyond the generic religious categories of Hindu, Musalman, Sikh, and Jain, and the government did not plan a regular census to follow 1868. The 1881 census was the first to count all of British India at once, pointedly connecting Panjab to its fellow provinces, but Panjabis remember this census for the report on caste written by the provincial superintendent of the census, Denzil Ibbetson, which has enjoyed numerous reprintings and continues to be the starting point for academic and amateur writings on caste in Panjab. [41]

After the profession of ignorance with which apparently all nineteenth-century administrators were obliged to preface their most positivist writings, Ibbetson provided a summary of the 'currently received theory of caste' and his own alternative. The current theory contended that caste was peculiar to Hinduism, consisted of the four

varna categories, and was perpetual and immutable. Ibbetson suggested that caste was a social rather than religious institution, that the varna categories were not universally applicable and hierarchized, and that caste was infinitely variable. [42] Ibbetson had to revise the 'current theory' in light of the actual census returns, but he could not bring himself to discount completely the validity of the 'current theory'. Because the 'current theory' was grounded in Orientalist interpretation of Sanskritic texts, he presented the two theories as a historical narrative. For Ibbetson, occupation was the historical foundation for caste, as it was the foundation for class in England. In India, occupation became inscribed in religious texts, and ultimately caste as a social order became separated from actual occupations. Conversion to Islam, therefore, had little effect on caste other than detaching it from its religious moorings; in the western and predominantly Muslim districts of Panjab, then, one found the 'tribal type of caste'. And at this point Ibbetson's prose began to unravel:

> Here the fiction which unites the caste, race, nation, or whatever you may choose to call it, is that of common descent from a traditional ancestor. In the main it is something more than a fiction, for if the common ancestor be mythical, as he probably is, there is still a very real bond of common origin, common habitat, common customs and modes of thought, and tribal association continued through several centuries, which holds these people together. But even here the stock is not even professedly pure. [43]

In the ensuing paragraph, Ibbetson chose to call it 'tribe rather than . . . caste', but the short passage cited here enumerated nearly every term and basis for social organization British administrators ever applied to Panjab. Here British expectations of a logical system, based on a limited set of principles and producing regimented sets of mixed or 'pure' groups, clashed with indigenous understandings of lineage which were responsive to fluctuations in political power and economic circumstances. Ibbetson knew enough to comment on the 'mutability of caste', but his quest for a system condemned him to centrifugal prose.

Part of Ibbetson's difficulty with Panjabi social life and ultimately terminology resulted from the limitations of his professional experience. Ibbetson joined the Indian Civil Services (hereafter ICS) in 1870, and his only experience before appointment to the Census was as a Settlement Officer in Karnal District, across the Jamuna River from the United Provinces. [44] Despite the similarities in social rela-tionships between herding and cultivating families in southeastern and southwestern Panjab, linguistic usages apparently did not correlate in the same way. On the census form, Ibbetson created three columns, in which he wanted enumerators to report 'original caste or tribe', 'clan', and '*got* or sept'. Even before the forms were prepared, translation became an issue:

> In the east *qaum* is used for religion and *zat* for caste; in the west *qaum* for caste, *jat* for tribe or clan. In the east *got* is the universal word for tribe among the peasantry, insomuch that the Rajputs call their royal races not *kuls* but *gots;* everywhere it is used by Brahmans, Banyas and the like for the Brahminical *gotra*; in the west it is unknown save in the latter sense. As for the local term for smaller tribes or clans they vary almost from district to district and from caste to caste. After consulting Commissioners we translated our headings '*usl qaum, 'zatya firqah,' 'gotya* shakh.' [45]

It seems that Ibbetson's model for devising the form was the landholding Rajput class of the Gangetic valley, which would have returned rather neatly as 'Rajput', 'Chauhan' and 'Khichi', for example. However, Ibbetson found that use of the word *asl* with *qaum* prompted respondents to provide their most ambitious genealogies, many claiming Mughal, Qureshi, or Rajput descent. In much of Panjab, only two rather than three names were in use, so that in many cases respondents invented, guessed, or consulted Brahmans to fill in the *got* column. [46] Ibbetson actually chose to quote in his report some of the most damning criticism of his own form, submitted by E.B. Steedman, an ICS officer who had spent his career up to that date in Gujrat, Jhang, and Dera Ismail Khan. Steedman reported that in some cases 'Rajput the "asl kaum," sometimes "Syal" the clan, and sometimes Chachkana

the sept or family, is entered in the first of the three [columns of the form].' Steedman also claimed to know 'exactly what answers an enumerator would get from a representative Syal zamindar. *Question*—What is your tribe (*kaum*)? *Answer*—Bharwana. *Question*—What is your clan *(zat)? Answer*—Syal. *Question*—What is your family *(got* or *shakh)?. Answer*—God only knows.' Steedman in the end felt that the form sought more detailed information than the necessary 'Syal, Ghakkar, and Awan': I do not think much is gained by working out returns showing the total population of the Bharwana, Chuchkana, Admal, Firozal, and Bugdial families. There are no restrictions on intermarriage between members of the different families.' [47] Ibbetson rebutted Steedman's criticisms by referring to the instructions that accompanied the census form, which suggested the second column be left blank if respondents gave only two names; therefore the blame lay in the hands of the enumerators, who demanded that all three columns be filled.

Both Ibbetson and Steedman missed important points. Despite the almost limitless flexibility of the terms 'Rajput' and 'Jat', Ibbetson insisted that they be recorded as the 'asl *kaum* , the most inductive of the three social categories on the census form. Ibbetson clearly attached a different status rank to these two terms, and his work suggests that the 'asl *kaum* , of Brahman, Rajput, and Jat, were intended to map onto the varna or 'caste' categories of Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaishya. These latter caste categories had perhaps even less meaning for Panjabis than the former categories, but varna categories could be applied across all of British India. Ibbetson created the census form with the intent to produce information accessible to administrators in other parts of British India, and despite the efforts of respondents to prioritise their own names within the linguistic framework of the census form, he rearranged the information in the returns to suit his, and presumably the empire's, ends. [48] In an uncharacteristic moment of short-sightedness, Steedman's closing remark about intermarriage contradicted the earlier portion of his response to Ibbetson. If Steedman's prediction of the response of the 'representative Syal zamindar' were accurate, then the lineage name 'Bharwana', and not

'Syal', would be the most important social category. In fact, nearly all of what the British knew about the precolonial history of southwestern Panjab, in particular Steedman's work on the 1880 settlement of Jhang district, suggested that the acrimony between the various lineages of Sials, Kharals, and other 'castes' or 'tribes' had been a political reality, and lineage cleavages had a very significant impact on how people in southwestern Panjab adapted to colonial regimes of property and revenue administration. [49]

New Terms and Changing Meanings after the 1881 Census

Negotiations over lineage groups enumerated in the 1881 census remained important, as officers in other departments of government sought to manipulate Panjabi social categories in order to achieve administratively localized ends. The two most important cases are discussed here. First, while the census was underway, officers in the Indian Army began to develop a recruitment policy dependent on what ultimately became known as 'martial races'. In the aftermath of the insurrections of 1857—8, officers had sought ways to reward loyal Indians and to restrict the distribution of arms to Indians thought to be categorically disloyal. The Army began to permit recruitment only to those men deemed to be born into 'martial races', a policy given formal voice by Lord Roberts in 1890. [50] Such a policy required the army to ascertain and ultimately gazette races as martial or not. It is true that the term used here was 'races' and not 'castes', but the names recorded in recruiting manuals belie the semantic difference. Volumes titled 'Sikhs', [51] 'Punjabi Musulmans', 'Pathans', and 'Jats and Gujars', for example, divided the landscape into recruiting zones, usually employing district boundaries, and drew up lists of 'clans' found in each zone. The clan names for the most part corresponded to those found under Ibbetson's third column, '*gotya shakh*'. Recruitment manual writers evaluated clans on the basis of physical characteristics, such as height, musculature, and endurance, but more importantly they evaluated mental characteristics as well, such as intelligence, courage, perseverance, pusillanimity, and, above all else, loyalty. Because nearly

all of these characteristics cannot be quantified, officers never used data; therefore, evaluations were always relative, either to British soldiers or most frequently to other clans of the same martial race. The process of gazetting martial races did not entail creating new lineage groups; instead the Army created a new category, 'martial race', into which fell a select number of pre-existing social groups more or less fixed by the census. The material privileges open to martial races meant that Panjabis were keen to achieve and protect their lineages' inclusion, as Richard Fox has shown; Tai Yong Tan's work on the District Soldiers' Boards in the twentieth century has illustrated Panjabis' awareness not only of the relevance of this new social category, but also of the distinct linkage between material wealth and the social status of army service. [52] Panjabis may not have created the social category of martial races, but they cultivated it in order to distinguish themselves from Indians of other regions and to amplify their status in relation to their local neighbours.

In the second case of creating a new social category, a combination of revenue and political issues drove members of the civil service by the 1890s to deploy with increasing frequency the terms 'agriculturists' and 'agricultural tribes' in descriptions of social relations in central and western Panjab. As the Panjab and Indian administration became more concerned with the dynamics of rural indebtedness, particularly in western Panjab, the terms 'cultivator' and 'agriculturist' came to stand for self-cultivating petty landowners who, according to census analyses, organized themselves as tribes. Administrators had assigned these tribes political significance as landowners in western districts, and advocates such as S.S. Thorburn prompted policymakers in Lahore and Delhi to worry about the possibility of a dispossessed and disgruntled frontier. [53] In order to deny grants of colony land to indigenous inhabitants, whom the government assumed were inferior cultivators, the government had recruited 'agriculturists' from the central districts of Panjab, sometimes moving entire villages. Colonies generally produced cash crops (wheat, cotton, and sugar) which, without railway transport to major urban markets, flooded local markets and drove prices down. Colonists had to borrow money to ensure steady cash crop

production and found themselves, like the petty landowning 'tribes' of western Panjab, indebted to local moneylenders. For administrators, the dilemma became one of how to keep title in the hands of the politically important petty landowning class rather than how to maintain a truly free market in land, which would have put title in the hands of financiers. [54]

The government passed the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900 with the intent to limit the ability of landowners to realize capital through the mortgage or sale of land, and thereby prevent moneylenders from making loans to the landowning class. Instead it unleashed a mad scramble to prove the inclusion of one's lineage in the category of agricultural tribes, because property remained the key to political power, and advocates of the Act explicitly sought to exclude commercial and financial classes from power which would have disrupted the order established in the nineteenth century. As documented in most accounts of the effects of the Act, British administration of the Act's provision created among the gazetted agricultural tribes a new class of financiers, that is, persons owning enough property to engage in moneylending. However, the role of gazetting in the award of canal colony land in the nineteenth century had already brought Panjabis' understandings of caste or tribe names as mutable social and political tools into the open. For example, 'menial' castes in Jhang in the early twentieth century began to 'adopt' the names Bhatti and Khokhar. [55] According to Ibbetson, service castes had erroneously recorded the caste name of their patrons as their own caste names, but in the twentieth-century climate of privileged castes and tribes, administrators viewed such returns less as miscommunication between census taker and respondent and more as the insolent opportunism of unpropertied classes. [56] In another case, colonization officers in the irrigation department in Chenab Canal Colony in the 1890s limited the grant of land to indigenous herders, known generically as *janglis,* to plots of approximately seven acres per family, forcing them to become cultivators. [57] After they had proven diligent cultivators on such minuscule plots, colonization officers began in the twentieth century to

reserve larger blocks of land for *janglis* [58] As word of the privileged status of *janglis* spread, numerous individuals and families approached colonization and district officers to make claims of *jangli* status, a claim which would have been disadvantageous ten to twenty years earlier. As British uses of 'caste' and 'tribe' for social and political engineering became more obvious, Panjabis had to make more frequent and less subtle public claims in order to take advantage of the mercurial needs of the British state.

Social Categories and Property

Negotiations between British administrators and their Panjabi informants over both the content and form of social categories such as caste and tribe suggest an historical process of creation of colonial knowledge that resembled less a 'dialogue process' and more a multivalent set of locally focused transactions. [59] While British administrators developed categories such as martial races and agricultural tribes in order to exercise greater control over Panjab, the participation of Panjabis in the development and naming of such categories meant that Panjabis were quite aware of the stakes involved in the processes of knowledge creation and could act, within certain limits, to maximize their own or their lineage's material returns on these processes. The generation of names for places (survey operations) and people (census operations) formed significant parts of those processes of conditional control and negotiation. [60] However, British administrators entered these negotiations with a notion of caste that fits remarkably well with George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's idea of ontological metaphor: '. . . viewing [caste] as an entity allows [the British] to refer to it, quantify it, identify a particular aspect of it, see it as a cause, act with respect to it, and perhaps even believe that [they] understand it.' [61] If British administrators in Panjab developed a systematic understanding of caste that would be good for something, primarily political control, Panjabis fed and milked the system in pursuit of the one thing that increasingly mattered at the end of the nineteenth century: property in land.

The cases cited above and the main argument about the negotiated creation of knowledge suggest a series of points relevant to histories of Panjab, of 'tribal' or pastoral areas of South Asia, and of caste in South Asia. The administrative need to square the richness of local information with imperial priorities required the production of a regional or 'provincial' level of knowledge that could serve as a translator, and 'caste' or genealogical naming was one of many categories of regional knowledge. Provincial administrators such as Ibbetson fashioned regional information for an imperial audience, while at the same time they had to translate imperial narratives of caste to scores of local census and survey takers. Translation also took place within the region. British attempts to transfer the social meanings of caste from the settled parts of eastern Panjabi *desh* onto the unsettled *bar* of southwestern Panjab failed until awards of state largesse began to be tied to *deshi* caste categories. This pattern of privileging settled cultivating areas over unsettled pastoral areas appeared repeatedly throughout northern and central India. Caste, as distinct from tribe, became one of many administrative tools for the settlement of uncultivated land and, as such, allowed administrators of regions of provinces to communicate with each other. Region, therefore, becomes one of many analytical frameworks available to understand the history of caste in South Asia, and equally caste becomes a way to understand the significance of region.

6

Civilizations, Markets, and Services

Village Servants in India from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Centuries*

Sumit Guha

Introduction

This article offers a historical analysis of the debate stemming from opposed understandings of a South Asian socio-economic institution and of its social history through the past few centuries. It focuses specifically on the economically, socially, and ritually significant practices grouped under the label of *jajmani* and/ or *baluta* system. These have been presented as exemplars of how productive activity can be organized on 'non-economic' principles, untouched by individualism and market rationality and determined by the fundamentally religious values of Hindu society. The missionary-anthropologist WH. Wiser is usually credited with the earliest formal statement on these lines. [1] A year after the second edition had appeared in 1958, the entire religious formulation was sharply criticized by Thomas Beidelman who argued that the system was maintained only by the exercise of the socio-economic power that arose from land-holding.

[2] As we shall see below, the influential Louis Dumont, perhaps heedful of this critique, did not use Wiser's description as evidence of the equalizing role of religious incorporation: instead he cited *jajmani* as evidence that a fundamentally inegalitarian spiritual principle could transcend and limit not merely the political but also the economic domain.

This is an issue with implications beyond the narrow worlds of Indology or social anthropology. While I do not intend to address this in the present article, the heuristic assumption that human beings must be grouped into large, temporally stable, and mutually exclusive 'civilizations' is central to the thought of Dumont and his ilk. This guiding principle once admitted, scholarly effort then logically seeks to identify the unifying demarcating principle of each civilization; and as the 'unique national spirit' so popular in the nineteenth century fell out of fashion after World War I, the seemingly more benign but still mutually incommunicable civilizational (or cultural) identity acquired a new prominence in the academy. Projected geopolitically, the 'civilization' is then endowed with the Hobbesian, self-aggrandizing traits of the erstwhile nation: and this model found its popularizer in 1996, with the runaway success of Huntington's *Clash of Civilisations?* [3]

Returning to Dumont on *jajmani,* it becomes evident that the effort to determine whether the economic (or political or any other mental construct) 'encompasses' or 'controls' arises fundamentally from the drive to find a unifying civilizational principle. Economic success being permanently reserved for the West, something else had to be found for India; and what better candidate than Hinduism, broadly construed? South Asian society then had to be amputated to fit the Procrustean bed thus fashioned. Twelve centuries of Islam counted for nothing:

> It is in short a question of two societies [Hinduism and Islam] which were strangers to one another in virtue of the opposition of their values, although living cheek by jowl in fact, their association resting on a sort of tacit and reciprocal compromise. For their part the Hindus had to adjust themselves for long periods and over huge regions to political masters who did not recognize Brahmanic

values, and they did not treat even the most humble Muslim villagers as untouchables. [4]

This sweeping statement can only be made if we understand 'society' so as to exclude many of the transactions that people routinely have with each other from the ambit of this term. Such a formulation is an obstacle rather than an aid to understanding. Perhaps what we need to do is eschew grand unifying principles and try to understand the meanings and motives that generate the repetitive patterns of meaningful interaction that we refer to as a 'society' or a 'social practice' or 'institution'. Nor should we anachronistically force these into boxes labelled economic/ social/ political/ religious/ etc. I shall now try and demonstrate this by a study of the links between the state, ascriptive status ('caste'), and economic life in western India through the past three centuries.

The first section of this article discusses the varying positions taken by major scholars on the issue before moving to historical analyses of two related institutions: *baluta* and *jajmani*. *Baluta* is used to describe a system in which specified goods and services were provided by hereditary functionaries to (theoretically) *all* the households in a given village community in return for equally specific payments in kind (sometimes supplemented with cash) at the harvest and on festive occasions. *Jajmani* has entered sociological literature to describe the relationship between a patron household and individual servant households that supplied it (and others like it) with goods or services in return for payments at harvest and on other occasions. While some scholars have seen these as distinct from each other, others like Dumont have treated them as expressions of a single civilizational principle. I shall, however, use these terms as defined in this paragraph.

The next part looks at evidences of the geographical spread and economic logic of the *jajmani* system in the twentieth century, and suggests that rent-seeking and the market were important determinants of its changing structure and regional prevalence. This section is followed by one offering a historical analysis of *baluta* in Maharashtra from the seventeenth century onward. It suggests that the practice was

always fraught with conflict and provides evidence of its occasional breakdown and re-establishment. It would follow, then, that the system may have repeatedly come into being and disintegrated in different regions at various times. The last part of the article shows this process at work. The institution was little known in eastern Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh in the early nineteenth century when it was solidly established in western Maharashtra. But intensive local enquiries reveal that it was beginning to establish itself in the eastern region. After reviewing this case, the article moves to conclude that *baluta* was not a primitive institution, but one that was created by the state out of competition between specialists in a commercializing rural society. Finally I must emphasize that this society was not composed of socially indistinguishable agents, each of whom was devoid of tastes, preferences and socio-religious ideas. [5]

Moving Beyond 'Economic versus Cultural' Explanations

The 'village servant system' or *baluta* system (to use its Marathi name) and *jajmani* system have attained a certain importance in social theory because they appear to exemplify the possibility of organizing the division of labour in complex societies on principles radically different from those formulated by mainstream economics since the eighteenth century. It is for this reason significant in the substantivist-formalist debate in economic anthropology, inaugurated by Polanyi in the late 1940s. This debate has prevented us from examining a changing set of institutional practices on its own terms, and thus impeded rather than aided a historical understanding of it. This was noted by C.J. Fuller some years ago. On the basis of a review of about a dozen twentieth-century village studies, [6] and some secondary historical literature, he correctly concluded that the concept of *jajmani* as a 'system' is 'predicated upon a combination of historical inaccuracy and the ahistorical premise of unchanging "traditional" India.' He then suggests that his demolition might open the way to 'a more productive analysis of forms of exchange in Indian society . . .' [7] This article aims at advancing that agenda.

But the debate is also significant as it forms (in the work of Dumont) a central support of the idea that South Asian (or Hindu) civilization is founded on principles totally different from those of the West, and that the caste 'system' is fundamental to it. More recently, Morton Klass reinstated caste theoretically as the economic centre of South Asian society. He was satisfied that 'one may view the South Asian caste system as a crucial integrative feature of a particular redistributive economic system . . . this is a stratified society: not everyone has equal or even equivalent access to the basic resource—land on which to grow a crop. And in this particular stratified society, we have observed that control and access is neither by individuals nor by households . . . Rather . . . *the South Asian socioeconomic system is structurally inseparable from the "caste system"*.' [8] In this he was echoing the work of W.C. Neale who had already declared that the 'economy of India was built upon the joint family, which was generally able to satisfy its own needs. When the aid of a craftsman or a special service such as that of a watchman was required, the village provided it. Cutting across village lines . . . the castes provided a code of behavior governing the relationships between members of the various castes.' [9] So perfect was the ideological integration that Neale imagined there 'was no bargaining, and no payment for specific services rendered. There was no accounting . . . and the whole produce was easily and successfully divided among the villagers.' [10]

Contrast this to the reality of a North Indian village around 1950, as described in the memoir of a Dalit youth who grew up in it. He narrates an incident deeply revealing of the actual texture *of jajmani* relations: his mother worked for 8 or 10 Tyagi households. One of these was celebrating a daughter's wedding, and his mother waited with him and his younger sister to clear up and take away the basket in which the guests threw their used leaf-plates and uneaten food. These scraps were her remuneration for the extra work. When all the guests had left, she asked for a leaf-cup of food for her children.

> Sukhdev Singh pointed to the basket full of soiled leaf-plates, and said, 'She is taking a full basket of food-refuse *(juthan)* . . . and on

top of that asks food for her children. Mind your status, O Chuhril pick up the basket and get out!'

. . . That day the goddess Durga descended into my mother. I had never seen her thus before. She scattered the contents of the basket, and said to Sukhdev Singh, 'Gather this and store it in your house. Feed it to your guests for breakfast. . . .' She took our hands and left, swift as an arrow. Sukhdev Singh had stepped forward to strike her but she faced him down like a tigress. From that day she never went to their door again and the custom of collecting soiled scraps ended in our household. [11]

Economic and political weakness and social inferiority continued seamlessly into labour market settings:

Most Tagas [upper-caste landowners claiming Brahman status] stint on wages for their employees. The reapers were desperate. After some protests, they took whatever was given and came home. Upon getting home, they grumbled or kept cursing the Tagas. But protest was strangled by hunger. Each year, there were meetings in the [Dalit] quarter over harvest-wages. Participants would swear not to accept less than one bundle out of sixteen harvested. But once the work was done, their resolve evaporated: one bundle out of twenty-one was the best that could be got. [12]

Neale's ideas of harmonious reciprocity are a less developed form of Dumont's famous understanding of South Asian civilization over the past few millennia as being constructed on the foundation of a normative inequality—something radically different from the allegedly Western norm of equality. In his view these relations of service were the most deeply resistant to the modernizing impact of the West: in the revised edition of *Homo hierarchicus,* he concludes:

in the caste system, profession is linked to status only by its religious aspects, and for the rest hinges on power, it has been possible for new neutral and urban professions to emerge, while the professions *really relevant* to the system (village specialities) were only slightly affected. At most it is likely that jajmani has

> become restricted to properly religious and personal services and has let escape some professions which it covered previously . . . *In the caste system the politico-economic aspects are relatively secondary and isolated.* [13]

We may, in passing, notice that this assumes right away that 'the caste system' is something quite distinct from the 'politico-economic' and that a profession easily separates into 'religious' and 'power-related' aspects. These, as I shall demonstrate, are profoundly ill-informed ideas —and, given the publication of Fukazawa's important essay in English in 1972, [14] perhaps deliberately so. In part, this arises from a truly archaic understanding of concrete market phenomena. Dumont believes that

> In a market all buyers and all sellers are as such identical, each after his own profit, and needs are adjusted unconsciously, by the market mechanism. But this is not the case here [the Indian village]: not only are the majority of the relationships personal, but this is so in virtue of an organization which is to some extent deliberate and oriented towards the satisfaction of the needs of all those who enter into the system of relationships . . .
>
> Whilst directly religious prestations and 'economic' prestations are mingled together, this takes place within the prescribed order, the religious order . . . We shall feel in the end that we are not in the world of the *modern economic individual,* but in a sort of co-operative where the main aim is to ensure the subsistence of everyone in accordance with his social function . . . In the one case, the reference is to *the individual* pursuing his own gain, in the other *to the hierarchical collectivity* . . . [15]

The conclusion to be drawn from this for the *jajmani* system is that it eludes what we call economics because it is founded on an implicit reference to the whole, which, in its nature, is religious or, if one prefers, a matter of ultimate values. [16]

The above quotation assumes that markets can only function by erasing all identities in the marketplace. In fact, it is only under special

conditions that buyers and sellers can really become anonymous and indistinguishable. As anybody (and especially a white anthropologist) who has shopped in a bazaar should know, buyers and sellers can find it advantageous to try and negotiate the best possible terms on a case by case basis, drawing information from signs of visible social status, including appearance, speech, dress, etc., to assess the other party. Equally, if buyers are not homogenous, neither are commodities, services, etc.: a vendor who sold at a uniform price could benefit from the ignorance of some consumers.

Uniform prices for homogenous products emerge in mass markets supplied by machine production, markets where learning about the other party is costly, either in direct money terms (e.g., buying a credit report) or in terms of opportunity costs (e.g., losing sales while getting this information via bargaining or personal enquiry). So the early Industrial Revolution and the modern city encouraged the emergence of mass markets where standardized goods were sold to a mass of indistinguishable buyers. But efforts at discriminatory pricing immediately re-emerge when the individual transaction increases in size or when the cost of information acquisition and processing falls. Such individualized bargaining is almost routine in trade in 'big-ticket' items (e.g., ships, passenger or combat aircraft, or turnkey industrial plants) where a few agents, who have a lot of knowledge about each other, interact. Finally, as modern information technology reduces the cost of acquiring and processing information, even vendors of mass-market consumer goods in developed countries (particularly the USA) try and build up consumer preference data-bases and profiles. The simple anonymity and 'no information except price available' is a model that dominated Western consumer goods markets after the Industrial Revolution and up to the current infotech revolution, which has substantially eroded it. [17] It should not be expected to shed much light on economic relations in typical South Asian rural situations of repeated interactions between a small number of transactors with a great deal of time on their hands.

In fact, discriminatory pricing based on social or other distinctions is advantageous if it allows one participant to appropriate some or all of the consumer surplus resulting from the transaction. A.C. Pigou in 1920 had already considered how discriminatory pricing might operate if agents could be grouped into sets distinguished 'by some practicable mark'. He also thought that even in the absence of such a mark, it might be possible to establish 'ideal discrimination' by detailed separate bargaining with every separate customer. [18] Needless to say, both these strategies are found in South Asian market settings, precisely because the limited communications infrastructure limits the size of the market and almost makes information a free good: people have grown up together and effortlessly know a great deal about each other.

Moving on to another aspect of *jajmani:* the sharing systems and payments in kind that lead Dumont to imagine that the village is 'a sort of co-operative . . .' [19] These systems of payment are easily amenable to economic explanation: they both provide incentives and spread the risks resulting from unpredictable fluctuations in yields and prices. But let us return to Dumont:

> What is the principle behind what is called the *jajmani* system? In the first place it makes use of hereditary personal relationships to express the division of labour: each family has a family of specialists at its disposal for each specialized task. Secondly, it regulates prestations and counter-prestations in a way which accords with custom: for the usual tasks, repayment is kind: it is not made individually for each particular prestation but is spread over the whole year, as is natural for a permanent relationship in an agricultural setting . . . A fact which underlines the limited but effective solidarity which is thus set up between *jajman* and *praja* is that in many regions those who are considered the main servants of the village enjoy an allotment of land from a communal fund set apart by their patrons.
>
> It is here that the division of labour that forms an integral part of the caste system may be most clearly understood. [20]

I cannot claim to be the first to say that the above-quoted passage is full of misunderstandings. First of all, the division of labour existed, and exists, independently of these dyadic relations—this is evidenced by the easy replacement of hereditary specialists occasioned by disputes, emigration, etc. Clearly then, the division of labour arises from the economic efficiency of specialization in most occupations: specialists usually do a better job. Secondly, the quantum of prestation (or payment) is seen by Dumont as practically fixed by immutable custom —but custom (as we shall see below) is continually contested and re-made by cheating, evasion, flight, and violence deployed by both villagers and superior authorities. Finally, the allocation of land to village servants was not done by their 'patrons' but by extra-village authorities, typically the patrimonial State. I must remark that the division of labour is accepted uncritically by Dumont—yet his schema does not require any division of economic functions—only of the polluting functions, which must be relegated to specialists, regardless of cost. If we admit additional division of labour aimed at securing higher productivity, we have already admitted economic considerations into the model of professional specialization.

Furthermore, the covert presence (and periodic overt deployment) of coercion implies that organizations are held together by something more than an unquestioning cooperative orientation to the fundamental values of the community. Again, even if there is a general societal consensus around the idea of hierarchy, this by no means precludes efforts at changing the individual agent's rank in it; and since the upward movement of some is equivalent to the downward displacement of others, such differences can only be settled by the deployment of socio-economic resources—expended in the means of coercion or the accessories of status-building. In short, the presence of hierarchical organizations does not exclude the possibility of individuals nonetheless pursuing their own ends by the deployment of resources calculated as adequate to their ends; which is to say, it does not exclude either individualistic rationality or calculation. If I may digress, I can also point out that Dumont (and others) were theorizing in the twentieth century when economic activity, far from being

conducted between myriads of atomized, anonymous individuals, was largely ordered by complex and hierarchical corporate organisations which engaged strategically with each other, and which were in practice constituted of numerous small-scale entities with their own unwritten norms and customs. [21] But this has not precluded maximizing behaviour by individuals within the setting of targeted discrimination by groups either. [22] So, to conclude, there is nothing about the observable functioning of village service institutions that requires us to turn to the allegedly eternal religious foundations of Indian civilization for an explanation.

Did *Jajmani* have a History?

For Dumont, *jajmani* like the Hindu tradition was practically timeless —it had no history. His source, W.H. Wiser, thought it had a history, and so have several later scholars. Wiser, who studied a solitary north Indian village from the 1920s, is usually credited with being the first scholar to formulate the idea *of jajmani* as an organized system, and one with ancient roots in Indic civilization. But unlike Dumont, Wiser believed that what he described in Karimpur was a relic of an ancient social organization, and therefore quite recent. In 1958, he wrote:

> The Hindu Jajmani System as it stands today in Karimpur is a disintegrated form of the ancient Village Commune.
>
> The Hindu Jajmani System as it stands today in Karimpur is ancient in that it recognizes the claims of the different occupational groups to a share of the earnings of the village as a whole, but it is not ancient in its detailed form as described in the preceding pages. [23]

Clearly, Wiser believed that something approximating to the western Indian *baluta* system had existed almost until his arrival: this had then disintegrated to generate *jajmani*. In this respect he would agree with Peter Mayer, whose detailed analysis of the evidence on *jajmani* in English-language sources was published in 1993. Mayer traced the earliest English mention of *jajmani* to Yule and Burnell's *Hobson-Jobson* of 1855. A complete description of a dyadic relationship akin to that

depicted by Wiser was found in E.A.H. Blunt's Census Report of 1911 for the United Provinces. Mayer also presented a novel view of *jajmani* —he saw it as the reaction by various service groups to new opportunities and pressures arising out of British rule and associated changes in the urban and rural economies. Notably, he saw it as resulting from the accelerated break-up of collective village tenures in which the landholding body collectively paid the land tax and regulated the services of the various village servants. The 'exclusive right to serve individual families of patrons' that came to be called *jajmani* (he speculatively suggests) may have originated no later than the settlement of British civil servants and others in the towns of north India. [24] He is also at pains to confine it to northern India, and to distinguish it and its precursors from the village servant systems of the Indian peninsula. He concludes that *jajmani* 'was probably in widespread existence in Uttar Pradesh for less than thirty years when Blunt first described it in 1911.' [25]

Blunt continued to examine the issue of caste through subsequent decades. He concluded that occupational castes, some of whom exercised traditional claims upon *jajmans*, actually originated in artisanal guilds of the first millennium CE, and would, in the twentieth century, move towards trade unionism irrespective of caste. An identical impulse created the trade guilds, the functional castes, and the twentieth-century landholders' associations and *mazdur sabhas* (workers' associations): 'namely—the desire of men with common interests to unite for the protection of those interests . . . ' [26] Thus the author of perhaps the only large-scale survey of caste in the middle Gangetic plains saw not merely *jajmani,* but *all* inter-caste economic relations generally as exclusively economic in nature. The distance of this from the Dumontian idea of the religious encompassing the economic need hardly be stressed.

Migrants, Markets, and Institutions

Mayer's emphasis on the changing, regionally diverse and entrepreneurial nature of inter-household relations is well taken, and is

supported by a valuable ethnographic source—the *Report of the Committee on Customary Rights to Scavenging* published by the Government of India in 1966. This committee corresponded with a number of State governments and also made local inquiries in many parts of northern and southern India before submitting its report in 1966. The 'customary right' described had all the features of what is referred to as *jajmani*.

> One particular scavenger acquires a right to clean such latrines, as against another scavenger. In small towns he is generally paid in kind (a daily *roti*) and some perquisites like food or clothes, etc., on some special occasion like births, marriages, deaths, etc., varying with the status of the householder. Often in bigger towns he is also paid partially in cash . . . and in cities he is generally paid only in cash. It is said that in times of need they sell or mortgage their rights to other scavengers in the same manner as one does with one's property . . .
>
> Where customary rights exist in the old form . . . the householder can change his scavenger only with the consent of the latter. In such cases the old scavenger enters into a deal with the new one who pays the former some amount according to the status of the householder. These transactions in common parlance are known as the selling of a particular *Brit*.

The status of human faeces in the purity—pollution schema must be obvious. If *jajmani* was an institution designed to cope with this (and other) polluting substances, it should have been present almost everywhere. But contrary to Dumont's belief that *jajmani* was 'more or less universal' in India, the committee found the 'old form' (or what anthropological literature described as *jajmani)* did not extend even to eastern Uttar Pradesh. It was found in the west and centre of that State, in Rajasthan, in Madhya Pradesh (excluding the eastern Mahakoshal—present Chhattisgarh—region), mainly in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat, in Punjab, and in (predominantly Muslim) Jammu and Kashmir. It was also found (as a recent importation) in the Telangana

districts of Andhra Pradesh and parts of Marathwada (eastern Maharashtra). [27]

The committee also sought to discover the origins of the system. It remarked on the fact that indoor latrines were few in the countryside and had usually belonged to people of high status who would not relieve themselves *alfresco.* These were cleaned by the village sweepers, who like other rural servants 'had a claim in each harvest. The quantity of foodgrains given to them was fixed according to the status of the *Jajman.* This type of *Jajmani* system still prevails in many areas. Apart from foodgrains and in some cases land, these artisans also got new or old clothes annually and perquisites . . . on ceremonial occasions like births and marriages and during festivals.' The committee plausibly suggested that wealthy rural households gradually moved to the towns accompanied by their servants; the latter then sought to monopolize their patrons by the custom described above. Long-distance migration from areas where the practice was prevalent could also transfer the usage: thus, numbers of Balmikis from western Uttar Pradesh and present-day Haryana migrated to the old Hyderabad state and divided the growing urban areas into beats held under customary law. Older local groups may have withdrawn or been bought out. 'In Marathwada also there is no local scavenging caste except a few Muslim Sheikhs. Mahars do only sweeping work. Scavengers from North India purchased *Brits* from local scavengers (generally Muslim Sheikhs).' It is evident that economic calculation was very much present in these transactions. Nor indeed was rent-seeking (and finding) unknown. In the town of Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh, there were 'only 18 Bhangis having *Brit-Jajmani* . . . Subsequently it was revealed that all of them had employed servants, usually municipal sweepers not having their own *Brits* for cleaning private latrines. The latter are only allowed to take *rotis* from households served by them. It was alleged that if the cash income from the families served by a tenant scavenger was, say, Rs 25 p.m., the *ilaqedar* would give only Rs 2 p.m. to the servant and pocket the rest of the money.' [28]

There were also entrepreneurs who acquired monopolies in newly urbanizing areas. 'These intermediaries or contractors by their shrewdness or cleverness enter into negotiations with new colonisers [developers] and set up new Jagirs.' This was also a channel for the investment of capital: the buyers of *brits* in Marathwada were often financed by Balmiki capitalists in Hyderabad at high rates of interest. [29] Despite so much evidence for adaptation to economic opportunity, the committee persisted in seeing disputes between householders and scavengers as a recent departure from traditional mutualism and ancient harmony. This was unsupported by any evidence: and, in fact, as we shall see below, the earliest records of this system are records of disputes and conflicts.

Much of the evidence here thus supports Peter Mayer's contention that the *jajmani* system was in many ways an innovation. Simon Commander, like Mayer, is sceptical of the cultural explanations of the relationships and prefers to view them as a form of labour relation, a type of piece-rated labour payment in kind, which goes into decline in the later colonial era as a consequence of migration, rising prices, and growing pressure on the land—a view not supported by the evidence cited above. [30] Mayer is, in fact, engaged in an attempt to portray *jajmani* as a novel and transitional relationship of service and payment, one which lasted little more than half a century and whose rise and decay may both be located within the colonial era. He also confines his analysis to north India, deprecating the attempts made by Beidelman and others, including Wiser, to assimilate the north Indian dyadic relationships with the village servant systems found in much of southern and western India. Radical though Mayer and Commander's critiques of *jajmani* as an ancient system may be, yet they join Wiser in subscribing to the village community and village servant system as an ancient functional organization, whose origins are presumably lost in the mists of time. The rest of this article will attempt a history of that organization itself.

The Village Servant System from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century

The late Hiroshi Fukazawa was perhaps the earliest scholar to attack the issue of *baluta* and *jajmani* in the pre-colonial period and to use contemporary sources rather than the conveniently accessible colonial reconstructions of the period. [31] He cogently warned that what is taken as traditional, or extant from time immemorial, 'may actually have developed in the very recent past'. [32] As Fukazawa's article is readily available, it is unnecessary for me to do more than list his main conclusions. First, he showed that the functionaries were maintained by the village as a territorial whole—thus conforming to the 'village servant' rather than the *jajmani* type of relation. He writes, 'there was one *baluta-watan* for every occupation in a village. Division of a *watan* did not increase its number; each sharer of the divided *watan* was considered to have a fraction of it. Moreover, what was divided was not the sphere of service but the emoluments from the *watan.* Therefore, in the process of division of a *watan* the related *baluta-* servants were not transformed from being "the servants of the village" to becoming "the servants of certain specific families"'. [33]

But (Fukazawa continues) they were differentiated into those who held their posts as a patrimony *(watan)* and those who were sojourners without such rights. Second, there were Brahmans functioning as priests who had exclusive claims to serve specific castes, but not the village as a whole. These households could be seen as having a *jajmani* relation to those Brahmans. [34] Carnivorous villagers would have a *jajmani* relation with the *maulana*—a functionary probably added in western Maharashtra under the Sultanates of Ahmadnagar and Bijapur (c. 1500—1650). Writing in 1819, Thomas Coats described this functionary as existing in many villages. 'The Mahomedan Sacrificer kills the sheep at sacrifices and festivals; his wages are a portion of grain and straw . . .' [35] H.H. Mann found the institution still in place a century later. [36]

Fukazawa traced a reference to the village servant system in Max Weber, who had termed it 'demiurgic'. Weber believed that Indian villages had allotted garden land and grazing common to 'craftsmen, temple priests, barbers, laundrymen, and all kinds of laborers belonging to the village—the village "establishment". They hold on a "demiurgic" basis; that is, they are not paid for their work in detail but stand in the service of the community in return for a share in the land or in the harvest.' [37]

What these village-centred models forget is that the community itself stood in the service of a demanding and peremptory set of overlords. Arbitrary demands for money, labour service, and produce were an inescapable feature of rural and urban life for most people. Forced labour for the needs of officials and other gentry was a heavy and erratic burden, and much of the energy of 'village servants' was in fact expended in rendering this government service, so as to prevent random villagers being conscripted for it. [38] This was evident when Sykes surveyed western Maharashtra in 1825—9, '[occasionally the answer to my inquiries respecting the duties of the Mahars was, that they were to do everything they were ordered, whether by the Pateel, the village corporation or by the government.' [39] So, for instance, when Nimbalkar of Karmalleh 'had one of his*pagas* of horse stationed near Wangi, the Mahars worked gratuitously for six months in the year, in the stables; on the removal of the*paga* Nimbalkar levied a tax on the Mahars, in place of six months stable work, but did not remit any of their ordinary duties.' In another township, the Mahars had earlier had the 'specific duties of gratuitously supplying all government officers who came into the district, and partly, also, the hill forts, with dry wood and grass . . .' [40]

These demands continued under British rule, ending perhaps only with the introduction of motor transport. Thus S.J. Thackeray, Principal Collector, wrote from Dharwad in 1824:

> As very few coolies are to be found here, and the class of Dhers and other Pariahs is quite insufficient to supply the demand, the

> Amildar's peons often press into service men who have never carried loads in their lives until the officers of our Government impressed them. When two or three hundred coolies are required, and only a day's notice is given for procuring them, the peons often seize upon inhabitants (with the exception of Brahmins and soucars [bankers]), indiscriminately drive them in a herd to the place of rendezvous and pen them like cattle until the arrival of the baggage.

Thackeray sought to revive what he believed was old usage and issued a proclamation requiring that 'the village officer is on no account to press the ryuts [peasants] for coolies but is to procure them without violence from the lower classes of Bedurs, Dhers, Dhungurs and other similar castes accustomed to carry burdens. Should there be not sufficient number of such persons, the deficiency shall be supplied from the neighbouring villages.' [41]

It is evident that the colonial administration was thus reinforcing and reviving a system of village responsibility that would in turn reinforce the *baluta* system. If the upper-caste villagers did not maintain an adequate number of village servants for such occasions, they risked being violently conscripted to replace them.

Landless and poor households were often selectively burdened by such exactions. For example, in the 1820s groups of Bhil tribals were induced to come down from the hills and settle near the villages in Khandesh, north Maharashtra. Colonial officials believed that they would be integrated into the village servant system and live peacefully thereafter as they had 'traditionally' done. The struggle over what was 'traditional and customary' now began, and the officer responsible for their resettlement warned that oppression could force them back into outlawry. He recommended that:

> Services expected to be performed by Bheels of the Plains in the vicinity of Hindoo Villages in consideration of grants of Land *require to be more strictly defined.* No Bheel should be compelled to labour or forced to plough for less than Hindoo labourers, or for

less wages than other Ploughmen receive; the remuneration if in Money, Grain or Cloaths should be distinctly specified . . .

Another most serious grievance is that in a village however well populated, not a Cart, a Bullock, a Driver, Guide or Begarree [forced labourer] . . . will be furnished by the Native Local Authorities from the Caste Inhabitants whilst any can possibly be pressed from the limited resources of the wretched Bheels at and in the neighbourhood of the village. [42]

Such tussles occurred not only with socially alien groups like the Bhils but were a general feature of times when the agrarian order was recovering from war or famine. This was the case in Pune district around 1710 when Pilaji Jadhav, an important official of the Maratha state, wrote to the village officers of the region: 'You reported that your province had long been desolate. But that it was now fortunately being resettled once again. All the villages were populated once more. The [holders of] the twelve *balutas* had all returned to the villages. But they began demanding exorbitant amounts in the name of customary dues. They demanded everything you [the farmers] possessed on account of dues. So you asked us to fix the dues. So we collected everyone and considered past usage and fixed the customs. Everyone is now to conform to this settlement.' [43]

Such pronouncements may have reduced conflicts, but conflict was always present, and recurred as individuals felt that they could exploit some fresh advantage. I quote one example from the surviving records of the period. In the mid-eighteenth century Ranoji, the headman of a village near Saswad, complained of the novel and excessive demands made by the village astrologer-Brahman (Joshi). He stated that this functionary had hitherto accepted various small cash payments from poorer families in lieu of the shawl he was entitled to receive for officiating at weddings; but he was now forcibly extracting a shawl from everyone. Again, he had formerly received *baluta* dues after the paying capacity of the farmer, the yield of the field, and the quality of the season had all been taken into account. (In other words, he had bargained from a position of weakness.) But now he simply sent his

Rangadi slave-woman to the fields with a horse, and she took as large a bundle as she wanted and loaded it on the horse. If the farmer protested, she abused him vilely. When the headman had gone to speak with the Joshi about this, the latter had threatened to beat him with a stick. The change in behaviour can be explained by the fact that the Joshi was now connected by marriage to the hereditary officers of the subdivision; clearly he was emboldened by this new alliance to enlarge his perquisites beyond the earlier 'customary' level. [44]

The fact of constant, if less dramatic, bickering over the quantity and quality of payments was suggested by WH. Sykes, who travelled through western Maharashtra for four years (1825—9) in his capacity as Statistical Reporter to the Government of Bombay and made minute inquiries in dozens of villages. 'Very rarely could I get either farmer or Bullootehdar to state specifically what the one gave, and the other was entitled to receive; it depended very much upon the crops, *and also upon the extent of services performedfor each individual cultivator.*' He was told by farmers in many parts of the region that they surrendered a quarter of the crop on account of *baluta* and other dues in kind. [45]

Occasionally such friction erupted into full-scale confrontation—so for instance the dispute between the Mahars of Rak and its headman went up to the great noble Fatehsinh Bhosle in 1738, and was settled only at his direction. The document enumerated the dues and duties of the Mahars on various occasions and ordered both sides to conform. Even religious functions were open to contest: thus in 1754 the Mahars of Sasvad contested the right of the Mangs to carry an earthen pot around the village as a part of the rite of exorcism. They were asked to produce evidence from the neighbouring villages that Mahars did indeed have such rights. They sought to do so, and then realized that this was against the usage of the country and withdrew their claims. [46] These two rival low-caste communities were often used to curb each other—in Sarola Kasar, a village in Ahmednagar district, the villagers replaced the hereditary Mahars with Mangs at some time in the 1920s. [47] So we may see that a good deal more than agreement on fundamental values was needed to ensure the sharing of the grain heap

that Neale, Dumont, and others would see as a spontaneous social process shaped by fundamental spiritual values.

More extensive monetization, the gradual extinction of forced labour for government purposes, and social protests by the Dalit classes marked relations between farmers and village servants by the early twentieth century. This tension forms a major theme in an early classic of Maharashtrian rural sociology—T.N. Atre's *Ganv Gada*—which is, however, written exclusively from the landholders' point of view. Atre, a middle-ranking colonial official with many decades' experience, states that unredressed rural grievances were advertised by the poisoning of cattle. If such cases became frequent in a village, then the government authorities temporarily confiscated the Mahars' patrimony on the assumption that they were behind the poisonings. Atre also describes how the district officers had (under Section 18 of the Watan Act) to assemble panchayats headed by the District Collector in order to settle these disputes. If the panchayat failed to reach a decision within seven days, the Collector gave a binding award. [48] Atre also wrote that the Mahars now only rendered free service to important people such as the headman, the district hereditary officers, and a few big farmers—and that too after they had been sought out and summoned.

The collection of customary dues is presented as a deeply conflict-ridden process; for example, he describes how village watchmen always went in bands to confront the farmer in his field. 'Going in a band means that argument, pressure and threat are deployed . . . To sum up, claims of entitlement, friendly pleas, begging, flattery and pilferage follow each other like beads on the same thread.' If caught pilfering by an enraged farmer, Atre continues, the landless castes appeased him by saying: "'Baliraja! We are your footwear! How can we fill our stomachs?" If that does not make him subside, these people say, "Well, well! Is it thus?" and utter words importing bloodshed and mayhem. The poor farmer *(kunbi)* fears that they may fulfill their threats by theft, by arson or by poisoning his cattle. So he perforce allows them to carry away what they have already pilfered.' [49]

Atre presents a vivid but one-sided view of the situation. In reality, here as in North India, the balance of power was tilted in favour of the landowners, and the twentieth century saw a steady decline in the dues received by village servants.

The Gokhale Institute of Pune pioneered rural surveys in Western India in the 1930s and has maintained a fine tradition of intensive village studies. M.B. Jagtap worked on the first survey of Wai subdivision in 1936—8, and on resurveys in 1942—3, 1944—5, 1959—60, and 1966—7. He lived mainly in his study villages from 1935 to 19 5 2. [50] His study of these villages through thirty years was published in 1970. By the 1930s there were already several villages without *balutedars*, and others where some functions were performed by craftsmen from elsewhere for cash payment. By the 1950s some *balutedars* had also ceased asking for *baluta* and preferred to work for cash payment. Jagtap notes that the *baluta* system was more completely preserved in villages like Gulumb, which were away from the main roads that depended more on local supplies and services. In 1936—7 10.98 per cent of the main foodgrain crops was paid out to *balutedars* in Gulumb, as against a low of 5.54 per cent in well-connected Ozarde. The average for three villages was 7.04 per cent. (We may recollect that in the 1820s Sykes had been told that 25 per cent of the crop was paid out as dues in kind.) By 1959—60 the shares had fallen to 3.69 per cent, and as food prices rose sharply in the 1960s, to a negligible 1.83 per cent in 1966—67. Jagtap explained this by the stoppage of payments to *balutedars* who were no longer needed, and the employment of craftsmen on a cash basis as required. Technological change also made it profitable to displace some: pumps replaced leather buckets in irrigation, and the services of the leather-worker came to an end. The largest proportionate reduction was (*pace* Dumont) in payments to sacred functionaries. The murder of Mahatma Gandhi by a Brahman led to the stoppage of payments to the Joshi in Gulumb and Kavthe after 1948. By the 1960s payments to the Mahars had also ended. [51] The refusal of services and rejection of beggarly payments in kind were also part of the Ambedkarite movement from the late 1920s, and Daya

Pavar's memoirs record how these practices were eroding as early as the 1930s. [52]

Jagtap studied only three villages, but two members of the Gokhale Institute staff used the data from the survey of a sample of 72 villages in 8 districts carried out in 1951—2 to write *Maharashtrachi Gramina Samajarachna.* The disintegration of the *baluta* system was already evident. Landless families paid cash for any services they required, and in many villages the *balutedars* had divided client households among themselves. Mahars were village functionaries in 66 out of 72 villages, but only those serving the government actually received any dues from the villagers. They served by rotation and had to wait years for their turn to come up. The Mahars were much more alienated from the village system than other functionaries. The carpenter was still the most important functionary, and found in 60 villages. Dues varied from village to village, but were usually paid per plough—or a sort of piece-rate. Iron work being more durable, the smith was a *balutedar* in only 25 villages. Even there cash had to be paid for some jobs. Many smiths preferred to locate themselves in roadside villages or towns and work for cash. Itinerant tinkers also serviced the villages. It was difficult for the investigators to ascertain the smith's *baluta* dues—they varied by special arrangements or needs. The leather-worker was a *balutedar* in 32 villages: his repair of well buckets and harness was crucial to raising irrigated crops. The description could continue. But everywhere the investigators found dues being reduced or adjusted according to economic need. Individual cultivators gave more or less depending on their employment of particular *balutedars.* The amount also reflected the yield of the harvest. Still, the investigators could clearly see that the 'village looks after those *balutedars* whose absence would cause difficulty; the others are pushed away.' [53]

Thus even where the village servant system had official recognition and support, it was continually restructured according to calculations of individual advantage, and ultimately largely abandoned. So, to sum up —sociologists have tended to take the frequently observed dyadic relation of service and dependence as a given, as stemming from deep-

seated cultural traits or fundamental values in Indian society. Implicit in this is the understanding that these are ancient institutions. Historians have been skeptical of this and inclined to argue that the dyadic relations observed in the early twentieth century were generated comparatively recently, as a consequence of the breakdown of previously extant village communities resulting from changes inaugurated by colonialism. But we need to probe deeper and ask what explains the existence of the village servant system in the precolonial era.

The Genesis of a 'Traditional Institution'

It is noticeable that all the scholars who have studied this problem have assumed that the village organization is itself a relatively unproblematic structure—arising perhaps out of the functional needs of isolated rural life. Yet it is striking that the system was strongly developed not in the most isolated regions of eighteenth-century Maharashtra, but rather in its densely settled and commercialized regions. Much (indeed almost all) of our evidence on its functioning comes from official efforts at its regulation and control. I suggest that this formal and regular structuring originated in the opportunity for the securing of rents (as fees or gifts or bribes) and the consequent preparedness of entrepreneurial individuals to pay the holders of political authority for the creation and protection of such rights. An important aspect of the *jajmani* system is then merely one example of a widespread phenomenon—rent-seeking and the investment of resources in creating permanent, heritable sources of rents. It is significant that these village offices were called *watan* (sometimes *vrutti*—both best translated as patrimony), and thus seen as analogous to other property rights.

Thus at the same time as the detailed descriptions of village servants with fixed dues in kind were being compiled in western Maharashtra, little trace of any such system could be found in thinly populated areas where the cash economy was undeveloped and the need for fixed services should have been all the greater. For example, Chhattisgarh (formerly part of the state of Madhya Pradesh) was in the early nineteenth century a landlocked region with limited trade. When

Jenkins wrote his report, he remarked on the absence of *watandars*—that is, of headmen or peasants possessed of hereditary rights in this area, by contrast to the Maratha territories to the west. The establishment of village servants was equally undeveloped, and those who existed were mainly employed by the *gaontia* headman (effectively tax-farmer) of each village. Even the barber 'owes professional services to all the village community, but is chiefly employed by the gaontia . . .' Only the smith and washerman seem to have been mainly employed for the benefit of the farming community as a whole. [54] Thus craftsmen and specialists were seen as dependants of the village lord, exactly like tenant farmers.

Much of Jenkins' knowledge was drawn from men like Vinayakrao Aurangabadkar whom he employed for nearly twenty years. Vinayakrao spent over three years travelling from village to village in Varhad and Chhattisgarh, interviewing and collecting information on local geography, institutions, antiquities, and practices. The hundreds of folios of his notes deposited in the India Office Collection in London bear impressive witness to his industry and command over languages. Much of the material consists of direct transcripts of interviews and answers to questions.

These field notes, therefore, give us a fine-grained picture of village institutions and traditions in the early nineteenth century. Reading them, we find that both *baluta* and *jajmani* had a very limited presence in this area. Thus Vinayakrao interviewed Bhimrai Thakur and other Halba landholders of Panadur when touring that area. They understood the term *baluta* and responded: 'there are no *balutedars* in Chhattisgad, but they are found in Panadur—the carpenter receives three measures of grain per plough as does the smith. What the barber gets is determined by each farmer individually. If the local priest, Gond priest, etc., were employed that year they get a basket of grain plus two more measures.' [55]

It is clear that the really essential functionary had established a fixed claim: others, including those concerned with purity (the barber) and the supernatural (the priest) had a quasi-wage relationship. This was in

a small town. In the smaller villages nearer the mountains the local Kavar chiefs stated flatly: 'In our country, the custom of *balotedari* does not exist; however the smith-carpenter receives 10 measures of grain for each plough.' [56]

The smith would obviously be a vital functionary in a farming economy, and it would be rational to pay him by the year rather than have to bargain every time a ploughshare had to be replaced or a tool repaired. The *khati*—carpenter-cum-smith—therefore crops up in almost every account. So, in Kanker subdivision, there were no village accountants, and Vinayakrao noted that there were no carpenters—people did their own woodwork; but the smith was present and received a basketful of grain for each plough. His clients had to bring their own iron. The washerman was given half or three-quarter *sers* of grain for each job. The *bhumak* (local priest) and the barber received some dues regularly. [57] Similarly, when landholders in Bhadak (modern Chandrapur district of Maharashtra) were questioned about the costs of cultivation, they reported that each plough paid the smith-cum-carpenter ten measures (unclear if this is *payli* or *kudo* measure) while the local priest and the village watchman received one measure each. [58] Yet, again in Balalpur subdivision, the village headmen told him that the *havaldar*—a functionary who helped collect the land-tax—received Rs 2 each month from the village fund; in addition, farmers might give him, at pleasure, up to one *kudo* measure of grain yearly. [59] This official had been introduced by the centralizing regime of the Bhosle kings and we can perhaps see his perquisites were beginning to harden into 'custom'.

In other places it is evident that such perquisites were beginning to appear as a consequence of the creation of various offices under Bhosle rule, which was accompanied by population growth and commercialization. As these became offices of profit, individuals would begin to acquire and dispute them, providing a political and fiscal resource for the regime to exploit. In the Chimur division, too, the bigger villages had a functionary called *havaldar* who allocated compulsory labour between households, and who would consequently

have considerable powers of harassment which he turned to advantage. So the local people reported that in some places he received a *kudo* of grain from each farmer, though it was not an approved usage. The headman's messenger and assistant held rent-free land from the state but also received a measure of grain from each peasant. State obligations fell on every office-holder. Even the local priest or *bhumak* was supposed to feed government messengers if they came to the village and carry messages for the headman. The priest did, however, protect the village from tigers and so received two measures of grain. [60] Umrad was a relatively more prosperous subdivision near Nagpur—much cloth was woven for export and there was an active trade in cotton, grain, etc. The term *barabalute* was known here, but the functionaries listed were: Vasi (local priest) [amount illegible]; Mahar, 10 *kudo* measures; sorcerer, 1 measure; astrologer, 1 measure, village watchman cum messenger one and a quarter measures. [61] But there were no *watandars* or hereditary holders, and not even a village headman whose family had held the office for generations could claim it as a patrimony. [62] This is a marked contrast to the more densely settled and commercialized lands of western Maharashtra, where saleable hereditary office was institutionalized by the sixteenth century, if not earlier. The reason was (I suggest) that the cash economy and competition made hereditary office a desirable acquisition, and its creation and adjudication a source of profit to the state and its ever- hungry local functionaries.

The way in which the regulation of the *baluta* system could be used to fiscal advantage can be demonstrated by a few extracts from the surviving ledgers of several tax farmers from western Maharashtra. These span the period from about 1750 to 1825. [63]

Half a rupee [fine realised]	Mahar did not serve the village properly
One rupee	Leather-worker left, the village of Pisa went to Amboli
22 rupees	Saheb Mitekhan beat a Mahar

One rupee . . . Leather worker left the village work undone, so he was made to complete it and fined

One and a quarter rupees Santu Potter failed to supply the mask for Mahalakshmi, so fined

I would suggest that the opportunities for such fees and fines as well as the ruling classes' need for specialized services from the villages on a reliable basis was important in the transformation of village specialists into hereditary office-holders. The changing social and economic conditions we reviewed earlier led to the gradual demise of the institution in the twentieth century. But individualized jockeying for social and economic advantage was present at all times.

Conclusion

It will be evident that I am deeply sceptical of attempts to trace socioeconomic institutions to fundamental values, and that I have found considerable evidence to suggest that individuals systematically sought to modify and invent customs and institutions to their own perceived advantage, and that the patrimonial and (the later) colonial state tried to derive fiscal and political advantage from these efforts. The varying outcomes of these ceaseless contests explains why institutions varied considerably at different times and in different regions. Society was never static, in some 'traditional' mode, and social change is not something that arrived in South Asia with colonial rule or the First Five-Year Plan.

7

Caste as a Social Category and Identity in Colonial Lanka*

JOHN D. ROGERS

In recent years, the scholarly understanding of caste has been transformed by new approaches that treat it as an historical phenomenon rather than a structural feature of Indian or South Asian society. In the older debates, the focus was on establishing caste's 'correct' or 'authentic' form within Indic civilization. In these works, the history of caste since the beginning of British rule was often seen as an anomaly—'real' caste, in its ideal and authentic form, was to be found in the deep past, before colonialism and modernity. Anthropologists and sociologists in the immediate post-war period sought out rural villages where they could document 'traditional' caste before it succumbed to the forces of modernization. Many lively debates ensued, but the participants tended to see caste more as a rather ahistorical key to understanding 'India' than an aspect of social organization that was constantly being reshaped by historical events. In most late twentieth-century scholarship, caste was linked to village or district ritual and economic exchanges, which were often seen as expressions of Hindu values found in classical texts. Distinct regional patterns and modern developments such as caste associations were portrayed as historical deviations from an ideal model.

The existence of caste throughout Lanka, where Hinduism is largely confined to the northern and eastern districts, was noted by some

participants in these debates. Louis Dumont, who linked caste inextricably to Hinduism, used the Lankan case to argue that caste among predominantly Buddhist Sinhalese could not be caste at all. [1] One of Dumont's targets was A.M. Hocart, who made extensive use of Lankan evidence to formulate a general model of caste, which was based on kingship. [2] Most scholars, however, saw Lankan caste as a pale version of the Indian model. For Sinhalese, the primary difference was identified as the lack of a religious ideology that justified caste. As Patrick Peebles put it, castes in Lanka 'are ranked, endogamous, hereditary named groups with traditional occupations, but there is no religious sanction for the caste hierarchy, and there are no Brahmins to integrate them. They are castes without a caste system.' [3] For Tamils, caste was also said to be somewhat weaker than its Indian counterpart, mainly because the few Brahmans in Lanka had little social or economic authority.

The newer and more historical approach to Indian caste is reflected in the recent syntheses by Susan Bayly and Nicholas Dirks, which provide narrative histories of caste from the eighteenth century to the present. [4] These works see regional and temporal differences in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century South Asian social organization as too marked to be explained by variations from one ideal system. Noting that there was no equivalent in South Asian languages for the term 'caste', which was first used by the Portuguese, they argue that it was under the British that, in Dirks' words, 'caste became a single term capable of systematizing diverse forms of social identity.' [5] Both writers, however, accept that many of the groups and social practices that came to characterize 'caste' existed before British rule, and that, in some regions at least, Indian society was becoming more 'caste-like' in the eighteenth century. They also accept that notions of collective inequality were widespread, and that this inequality could be expressed in various ways, including political or legal position, differential taxation, dress, food, occupation, religious practice, and marriage customs. Early British accounts of Indian society reflected the diverse social practices found in the subcontinent, using the term 'caste' in different ways and giving it

various levels of importance. It is only in the 1860s, with the beginnings of what Dirks calls the 'ethnographic state', that caste, along with religion, became central to an all-India sociology.

This article reassesses caste in Lanka in the light of these new interpretations for India. I argue that before the 1830s both the social practice of Lankan 'caste' and its perception by Europeans fell squarely within the range of regional variation found across South Asia. It was only in the 1830s, when the colonial state in Lanka decided that caste was not a legitimate form of social identification, that the divergence between the island and mainland became marked. The full significance of this change was felt only in the late nineteenth century, when the Indian state employed caste systematically in censuses, customary and criminal law, representative politics, race theory, and many other matters. The absence of caste in official discourse precluded its use in these ways in Lanka, but it did not disappear. Although it often remained in the shadows, caste remained important in social life and elite politics, and was not always ignored by the state. Given the importance that many scholars of India place on nineteenth-century official discourse and policy for understanding identity formation, the Lankan case thus takes on theoretical importance. It serves as a South Asian instance of 'caste' under modern and colonial conditions, but where it was largely absent from state discourse.

Caste in Lanka before the 1830s

Social organization in eighteenth-century Lanka varied considerably by location. A common thread, however, was the presence of 'castelike' groups. In comparative terms, Lanka appears more caste-like than South Asia as a whole, in part because both of the island states made 'caste' groups central to their administrative structures. Moreover, by contemporary South Asian standards, the population was relatively settled and under effective political control. Although many Lankans travelled in order to make a living, they often did so as part of their state service.

The predominantly Sinhala-speaking southwestern region, which was the richest and most populous, had come under Dutch control in the mid-seventeenth century. The Dutch, like the Portuguese and the Kotte Kingdom before them, used hereditary groups for purposes of labour mobilization, economic organization, and taxation. [6] The majority of these groups became known as 'castes' in the nineteenth century, but for administrative purposes the Dutch treated other groups, such as the Moors (Tamil-speaking Muslims), similarly. Although variants of the term 'caste' were employed by the Portuguese and other Europeans from the sixteenth century onwards, the groups covered by this term were variable, and there was little sense that they composed a 'system'. At this time, the European term 'caste' had the same flexibility as Sinhala words such as *jatiya* or *kulaya,* which connoted 'group', 'species', or 'kind'.

The most numerous group in the southwest was the Goyigama ('cultivators'), who probably made up a majority of the population and were considered the highest caste by both the Portuguese and Dutch. Three other important groups were concentrated near the coast and did not have service or ritual relations with the Goyigama. These were the Karava, Durava, and Salagama, whose respective 'natural' occupations were said to be fishing, toddy tapping, and cinnamon peeling. They lived mostly in caste-homogeneous settlements, and their origins lay in immigration from India between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries. [7] This area also had another dozen or so endogamous groups of middling to low status, none of which were very numerous. At the local level many of these groups, such as the Hena ('washers'), had ongoing service relations with other castes, whereby they were expected to carry out certain tasks on a regular basis.

Obligatory government service was connected to caste membership but was not shaped entirely by caste. Some of the functional departments drew on the labour of persons from multiple castes, and others employed only some members of particular castes. The Dutch, like the Portuguese and Kotte states before them, sometimes intervened to change service obligations so that they better met the state's needs.

The Salagama serve as a striking example. [8] Their original 'natural' occupation was weaving, but as cinnamon gained importance first Kotte, then the Portuguese, and finally the Dutch moved them increasingly into this industry. Although some Salagama continued as weavers well into the eighteenth century, by this time their 'natural' occupation had become cinnamon peeling. In this case, the state had a keen interest in caste boundaries. The Dutch devoted much energy to ensuring they had accurate lists of all Salagama men who were eligible for service, and continuously updated these lists to record deaths, births, and persons reaching adulthood. [9]

The relative power and status of different groups was contested during the centuries before the establishment of British rule. In the late seventeenth century, the Dutch appointed some Karava to positions of territorial authority, with power over village headmen in districts that included villages populated by different castes. [10] By the eighteenth century, despite a suspicion that the Goyigama were less loyal than other castes, the Dutch abandoned this policy, and a newly-emergent Goyigama 'aristocracy' monopolized the territorial posts. However, as the eighteenth century progressed, the aristocracy's power was offset by the Dutch practice of bypassing Goyigama headmen and instead forging direct relations with non-Goyigama caste leaders, who contracted to supply the Dutch with labour and goods. [11] Castes that forged direct relations with the Dutch included the Hunu ('lime burners'), who agreed to provide limestone; the Karava, who specialized in transportation and provided labour at ports; and the Durava, whose duties included work in the elephant trade. The most significant of these arrangements, however, was with the Salagama. In the late seventeenth century, the Dutch attempted to force them to gather and process as much cinnamon as possible, relying mainly on coercion, applied through Goyigama officials. Salagama social status was low; the first Dutch governor described them as 'a despised people among the inhabitants'. [12] But in 1708 leading Salagama headmen received the high-status title *mudaliyar*, which replaced their earlier title, *duraya,* which implied low status. Thereafter, the power of Goyigama headmen

over the Salagama diminished. The fortunes of the Salagama varied in the first half of the eighteenth century, but after the 1760s the Dutch increasingly treated them as a favoured group in order to encourage their loyalty, and industry. Their headmen received more and more power and their status improved sharply. By the end of Dutch rule, Salagama privileges included exemption from the authority of Goyigama headmen, freedom from tolls at ferries, the right to engage in coastal trade, the free collection of Hambantota salt, and exemption, except for the most serious crimes, from the jurisdiction of ordinary courts. [13]

Other groups also improved their position during the eighteenth century. The Karava in particular, who had also done well during Portuguese rule, continued to make great economic and social strides. [14] But while both Salagama and Karava leaders sometimes rejected the notion of Goyigama supremacy, they never received from the Dutch the right to display, through dress and retinues, quite the same level of social status as the highest Goyigama officials. [15] Moreover, the Goyigama successfully resisted most attempts to put non-Goyigama in positions of authority over them. In 1746, for instance, the Dutch named a Durava to the post of chief of the Elephant Department, but after protests the appointment was reconfigured so that the Durava official did not have authority over Goyigama workers who also served in this department. [16] While the Dutch exempted some non-Goyigama from Goyigama authority, they rarely placed Goyigamas in a position where they were subservient to other Lankans.

At the local level, service and lower castes were subject to regulations on their dress, on the type of houses they could live in, and on marriage and funeral customs. The Dutch enforced these restrictions, not out of any ideological commitment, but in order to maintain social order. But some groups were dissatisfied. In 1759, for instance, some Hena appealed to the Dutch for the right 'to wear coats and hats for men and stockings for women, and to have the privilege of travelling in palanquins and of using umbrellas.' [17] This plea was made not on behalf of the Hena as a whole, but for a particular community of Hena. It

appears that such restrictions were a patchwork of local customs that varied from locality to locality, and which were applied differentially to various communities of the same caste. In other words, the details of sumptuary rules, like the details of service obligations, varied by locality.

In the Tamil-speaking Jaffna peninsula in northern Lanka, which also came under Dutch rule in the seventeenth century, another group of 'cultivators', the Vellalar, was increasingly dominant, despite some Dutch efforts to balance their power with that of other landholding castes. [18] The Vellalar had a firmer grip on the peninsula than the Goyigama did in the southwest. Their power was maintained by government appointments and by the 1707 codification of a 'customary law' for the peninsula, which reflected a Vellalar view of the social order. In Jaffna, as in parts of India, some lower castes acted as servants or 'slaves' of the landholding castes, in return for a notional guarantee of subsistence. [19] This was probably a rather new development; some castes that were previously in bonded service to the state seem to have become dependent on the Vellalar during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Some middle-status groups, including artisans, also participated in Vellalar-centred economic and ritual networks, but other groups such as the Karaiyar ('fishers') were outside these networks, and did not always accept Vellalar claims to superiority. However, the Karaiyar, who like the Karava of the southwest had converted to Christianity in large numbers and had been favoured by the Portuguese, failed to better their economic position in the eighteenth century. It may be that the Dutch did not give them opportunities for mobility because in Jaffna, unlike the southwest, there were other landholding castes, most importantly the Madapalli, that could be used to counterbalance the dominant caste's power.

The Kandyan Kingdom, based in the island's central highlands, remained outside European political control until 1815. Unlike in the southwest or the north, in Kandy the rulers themselves were part of a 'caste-like' entity. [20] The ideology of Sinhalese kingship held that kings should be Kshatriya. In the words of H.L. Seneviratne, the king 'had

inherent in him a ritually pure caste status, that both justified his kingship and "demanded it of him". [21] This idea had contributed to a long history of intermarriage between the Sinhalese and mainland royal families. In 1739, when the king died without a direct heir, his wife's brother, who had been born in southern India, assumed the throne. [22] The Nayakkar, as the new royal family came to be known, were an influential community at the court and in Kandy, the capital, but royal power was always dependent on the nobility, which was drawn from a Goyigama subgroup, the Radala. In the Kandyan countryside more generally, as in the southwest, the Goyigama were not only the highest group but the largest one. Except for the Nayakkar and the Vanniar, a regional landholding group found on the northern periphery of the kingdom, the rest of the population was subservient to the Goyigama. Some of these Kandyan groups lived only within the kingdom; others were also found in the southwest. Higher-level territorial appointments were drawn from the Radala, a Goyigama subcaste, and subordinate territorial appointments were filled by other grades of Goyigama.

As in the southwest, most castes had 'natural' occupations, but some service departments were multi-caste, and not all members of a caste performed the same duties. The officials who oversaw these service responsibilities were not always Goyigama—these appointments were sometimes made from among non-Goyigama groups that provided specialized labour service. Moors, for instance, were sometimes appointed to head the *madige badda,* which was made up of Moors and Karavas, and provided services connected to transportation and trade. [23] None of these non-Goyigama officials, however, had autonomy approaching that achieved by Salagama headmen in the Dutch territories. In general, the labour and service burdens required of non-Goyigamas exceeded those required of Goyigamas.

The general trend within Kandy in the eighteenth century was towards greater political and ritual integration of the kingdom's population. As in some parts of India, there was less room for family or individual mobility in the eighteenth century than there had been in the centuries immediately preceding it. [24] Moreover, the power of the

Radala aristocracy increased in the late eighteenth century, when it became increasingly common for one person to hold appointments over both territory and service. This centralization of power was also linked to the reconstruction of Kandyan Buddhism in mid-century, which resulted in large grants of land to support religious institutions and a general tightening of the ritual and social order. [25] In 1753, a mission was sent to Thailand to bring the necessary number of monks to restore the *upasampada,* or higher ordination. After a brief period when some non-Goyigama monks from the southwest received ordination, the process was confined to the Goyigama. [26] This royal decision had importance beyond Kandy, because it was resented by many Karaya, Durava, and Salagama laymen in the Dutch territories, who desired monks of their own caste. [27] In 1772, despite Kandyan opposition, an ordination ceremony for non-Goyigama monks was held in the southwest. Kandyan dominance of the sangha was further weakened in 1800 when a number of non-Goyigama monks and novices travelled to Burma, where they held an ordination ceremony that came to mark the beginnings of the Amarapura fraternity. From this point onwards, fissures within the Buddhist sangha followed partially along caste lines, though some Goyigamas joined the Amarapura fraternity, and doctrinal disputes also divided the sangha.

At the village level, the late seventeenth-century account of Kandyan society produced by the British captive, Robert Knox, portrays largely endogamous social groups that were defined through land tenure, service obligations, and differential shares of status, honour, and power. [28] As elsewhere in Lanka, there was no full-scale jajmani system, though in many localities certain groups performed a limited set of services in return for in-kind payments. [29] The state enforced rules that governed status, including those concerning the exchange of food, dress, marriage, and other forms of social interaction. As Lorna Dewaraja has observed, the 'length of the lower garment, the right to wear an upper garment, the forms of address, the prefixes and suffixes added to the names were all fixed by social usage.' [30] These distinctions applied not only along caste lines, but also within subdivisions of the

Goyigama. Except on the kingdom's northern periphery, there is little evidence of caste councils similar to those found in some parts of India. Nor is there evidence that any groups explicitly challenged Goyigama dominance in eighteenth-century Kandy. However, there were many individual violations of caste restrictions, for instance when a woman had sexual relations with a man of lower status. When there were complaints from the woman's family, such incidents were treated as criminal offences, but in their absence these irregularities were sometimes tolerated. [31]

The British took control of the Dutch territories in 1796, and the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815. In both instances, they pursued policies they hoped would reinforce the existing social order. In the southwest, the British decided in 1797 to appoint only Goyigamas to territorial chief headman positions. [32] In this instance, the British were following the Dutch precedent, but were more conservative than the Dutch in assigning non-Goyigama officials powers that overrode the territorial administrators. When the British sought information about Lankan social structure, they usually relied on their chief headmen, who naturally promoted Goyigama claims to supremacy. In 1815, for instance, the Collector at Colombo, in response to a query from the Commissioner of Revenue, noted that he had 'spent much time searching the Dutch records, but have found nothing concerning the cingalese casts.' [33] Having failed to find written documentation, he relied on 'the most intelligent and experienced headmen'. The position of leading Goyigama headmen became stronger than it had been in the late eighteenth century, mainly because the British had concluded that they constituted a hereditary feudal aristocracy that had widespread support and respect among the people. [34] The British did, however, appoint non-Goyigamas to positions of authority as clerks, interpreters, translators, and even to high-level administrative positions within the 'native administration'; and caste was not taken into account when the state awarded potentially lucrative contracts to collect taxes or administer monopolies. [35]

The British, like the Dutch, enforced a system of compulsory ser-vice, which in one form or another had been central to the political economy of the southwest for many centuries. [36] A minority of the population provided their labour in return for rights to land, but most men were required to work at particular tasks at rates of pay set by the government. While there was a correlation between the 'natural' occupation of a caste and the service required of its members, many individuals were by custom required to do their state service in different fields. The lower classes of almost all castes, sometimes even the Goyigama, could be called upon to carry loads and serve as general labourers. Other Goyigama tasks included administrative work, hunting elephants, and dragging timber. The duties of the Karava, who were often labelled 'fishers' in English-language documents, included rowing boats and serving as carpenters, woodcutters, and coolies. The British, however, devoted the most energy to ensuring that the Salagama performed their duties for the Cinnamon Department. [37] They enforced a Dutch regulation that dictated that the offspring of all unions where one parent was Salagama be required to work in the industry, and as late as 1827 they issued a regulation that made it a crime to encourage a Salagama to leave the island. [38] The courts heard many cases, some brought by the Cinnamon Department and others brought by Lankans, where the Salagama status of an individual was under dispute. [39]

In this region, as in most of Lanka, some service castes were by custom required to serve other groups on a regular basis. Although the British sometimes sought to enforce such obligations when they believed them customary, they never collected any information on this subject—magistrates had to judge each case on its own merits. [40] In 1830, some Panikkis ('barbers') sued some Henas, arguing that they should be compelled to wash their clothes. [41] The Henas replied that the Panikki refused to shave them. In response, the Panikki said they could not shave the Hena because the higher castes would then refuse to employ them, but that they were willing to pay the Hena cash. The judge decided that neither party could be required to serve the other,

but in many places service castes were either willing to continue performing services or local conditions did not give them a choice. Most conflicts took place where a local service caste had gained enough economic and social status to see the performance of their 'traditional' service as irksome or demeaning. An 1830 petition from some Hena stated that 'it is certainly a duty incumbent on all castes of people to serve the Government respectively according to custom, but the practice of compelling one caste to serve another is injurious.' [42]

The British also ruled upon disputes concerning dress and the display of other public marks of status. James Cordiner, writing in 1807, stated that 'Only certain casts are allowed to wear coats, to carry parasols, or to have servants attending them with umbrellas: and if any person should assume one of these marks of distinction, to which he is not entitled by his birth or office, a mob would immediately surround him, and carry him as a criminal before the nearest magistrate.' [43] Most of these conflicts pitted Goyigamas, Karavas, or Duravas against service castes. Many disputes focused on the dress worn by Hena men at formal occasions. An 1816 petition, which protested a Karava official's refusal to sanction a Hena marriage unless the groom took off one of his combs, mentioned two other recent disputes involving Hena ceremonies. [44] The issue in question was defined by the petitioner as to whether or not he was dressed 'in the ancient custom that is suitable to his cast.' Six years later, in 1822, two Christian Goyigama successfully sued Henas for 'having assumed to put on Ornaments and Dresses contrary to the usages and Customs of the Country.' [45] In another case that same year, a Hena sued four men for stripping off the coat he had donned for his marriage, but the court dismissed the case because 'the plaintiff assumed a Dress not consistent with the privileges of his Cast.' [46] But after around 1825 more and more courts seem to have refused to enforce these restrictions, perhaps because there was no authoritative body of knowledge from which they could judge complaints. In 1829 a petition from Goyigamas and Duravas complained that the low castes had been for the past five years violating custom by 'wearing jackets, gold and silver ornaments, and constructing tiled houses.' [47]

Competition among the higher castes took different forms. Some non-Goyigamas tried to counteract Goyigama influence on the British view of the social order. A prominent early-nineteenth-century caste propagandist was the Salagama headman, Adrian de Abrew Rajapakse. [48] He claimed that the Salagama had Brahman origins and that their status was similar to that of the Goyigama, but his campaign had much more effect on missionary and antiquarian accounts of Lankan society than on government policy. Public employment was another site of conflict. Several years after the assumption of British rule, the three Goyigama teachers at a government school attempted to get their Karava colleague dismissed on caste grounds. [49] Some three decades later, in 1833, the Governor noted that many non- Goyigama in the southwest were equal to the Goyigama in wealth and education, and that these castes believed they had an equal right to public employment. [50]

In Jaffna, the position was somewhat different. In 1806, the British issued a regulation that gave legal force to caste obligations in the peninsula, where distinctions in matters such as the sharing of food and everyday social interaction were more pervasive than in other parts of Lanka. [51] The Governor, Thomas Maitland, stated that the 'right of servitude' possessed by the higher castes was 'on the whole wise in principle and salutary in its effects', because the relationship included an obligation on the part of the higher castes to support the lower ones. [52] The British also enforced sumptuary rules. Low-caste persons could pay a fee for the right to wear ornaments and use conveyances on formal occasions. The Collector at Jaffna wrote approvingly that the practice 'prevents persons from the inferior casts from infringing on the ceremonies and Distinctions of Respect due only to those of the higher casts.' [53]

From 1815 to 1833, the British governed Kandy separately from the rest of Lanka. As in the southwest, they continued the system of compulsory labour. They also enforced caste distinctions, including restrictions on dress, as part of their commitment to maintain 'Kandyan

law'. [54] When headmen in Sabaragamuwa complained to the British about a Goyigama woman from near Colombo who was living with a Batgam ('drummer') man, officials entered into a long correspondence to determine not only how such a case would have been handled before 1815, but also what measures would satisfy high-caste sensibilities. [55] Another case from Sabaragamuwa, where a Batgam woman was living with a Rodi (outcaste) man, also drew the attention of officials. [56] In the end they decided to banish her to the southwest, as they could find no village in the Kandyan Provinces that was willing to accept her. There were, however, some circumstances that the British handled differently. In 1821, responding to cases where women had been killed 'under pretense of wiping off a stain occasioned by their having been violated by persons of a different Cast', the law was changed so that these actions were treated like other murders. [57]

Although the British relied mainly on the views of Radala headmen for information about Kandyan social organization, they also made some tentative efforts to establish their own knowledge. John Davy, for instance, included a list of Kandyan castes in a book published in 1821. [58] His idea of 'caste' was quite similar to the definition that became commonplace across South Asia later in the nineteenth century, but in Lanka in general, as in India, there was no consistency in what groups were labelled as 'castes'. Before the l830s, almost any group—including those designated as races, nationalities, or religions in other contexts—could be called a 'caste'. The responses to an 1818 circular and the tables found in the 1827 census illustrate how the early British notion of caste was variable. [59] On both occasions, caste was formulated differently in different districts, and groups such as Moors, Europeans, European Descendants, Burghers, Tamils, Sinhalese, and Descendants of Slaves were found on lists along with the Vellalar, Goyigama, Karava, and other 'castes'. At this time, in both India and Lanka, there were also many inconsistencies in the use of terms such as 'tribe', 'race', 'class', and 'nation'. Colonial sociology was primitive compared to the later efforts to standardize knowledge and objectify identities. When elites divided

themselves into categories when petitioning the British, similar inconsistencies in nomenclature were evident. [60]

Early British ideas about 'caste' in Lanka were consistent with their impressions and actions elsewhere in South Asia. The idea that 'caste' was less important in Lanka was a later development, one which followed rather than preceded the changes in government policy of the 1830s. Lankan social organization had its own distinct characteristics, but these differences fell into a range typical of regional differentiation in the subcontinent as a whole.

Lanka and India: The Divergence of Colonial Policy and Rhetoric

In 1832, British policy towards caste moved in a direction quite different from what was to take place in India. On the instructions of the Colonial Secretary, Viscount Goderich, the mercantilist political economy based on the mobilization of compulsory labour was abandoned. [61] Goderich was acting on the advice of the special commissioners, WM.G. Colebrooke and C.H. Cameron, who had completed an inquiry into the colony's affairs. The change was part of a set of policies known as the Colebrooke—Cameron Reforms, which were designed to bring 'progress' to Lanka along liberal and utilitarian lines; in particular, they sought to change Lanka's political economy from mercantilist to capitalist, in large part by creating a free, flexible, and cheap labour market. From the reformers' viewpoints, if caste was no longer needed for labour organization, it was not needed at all. Colebrooke disliked caste in principle, calling it one of the 'prejudices of the people', and he argued for its non-recognition by the government. [62] Goderich agreed, noting that the system of compulsory labour was flawed in part because it had required the government to acknowledge caste distinctions. It soon became government policy to not acknowledge caste. [63]

The new policy met some resistance when it was first proposed. In 1830, Sir Edward Barnes, the Governor, wrote that the commissioners'

criticisms were unfair: 'When we talk of caste and privileges arising therefrom we should do well to look a little at home. There are no situations of Headmen in this island hereditary, no such exclusive privilege as appertain to a British peer who is born an hereditary Counsellor of the King and a Member of the Legislature, besides various other privileges.' [64] Barnes also argued that the government had not been bound by caste distinctions when making headman appointments. He concluded that 'the subject of caste had much better be left to the progressive effect of civilization.' [65] In London, however, his views were rejected. Colebrooke felt that the headmen are 'in general strongly imbued with the prejudices of Caste', and proposed that future appointments be dependent on a candidate's willingness 'to discountenance the prejudices of the people'. [66]

Although in practice the colonial state never disregarded caste completely, the normative view that it was undesirable took hold quite quickly among many officials. Many regulations and policies that took explicit note of caste were repealed or ignored. Kandyan criminal law, which included caste slander and took caste into account for determining punishments, was no longer enforced after the 1830s and was abolished formally in 1852. [67] The government's failure to acknowledge caste became, for many officials and elite Lankans, proof that they were promoting progress. In 1843, for instance, the 22-year-old lawyer, Richard Morgan, who later became the island's Queen Advocate, argued in a debate on the composition of juries that 'the toleration of caste is perfectly incompatible with the enjoyment of free institutions; it is opposed to the fundamental principle of the British constitution which declares that all men are equal.' [68] In this same year, the jury system that had been in force in the former Dutch territories since 1810 was reformed, so that lists of jurors were drawn up by the juror's choice of language (English, Sinhala, or Tamil) instead of status. [69] Two years later, in 1845, a government circular ordered that no official should mention caste in any public proceeding. [70]

In India, in contrast, there was never any general attempt by the state to withdraw its recognition of caste. The muddle prevalent in both Lanka and India in the early nineteenth century continued largely unchanged in India until the mid-century, when the British, in Bayly's words, 'significantly expanded and sharpened these [caste] norms and conventions, building many manifestations of caste language and ideology into its structures of authoritative government.' [71] As is well known, British efforts to label, enumerate, and rank castes had important political and social consequences. [72] In contrast, in Lanka caste was excluded from modern censuses, and it was never used as a formal category in criminal law or in any structures of representative government.

Why did British policy and discourse towards caste diverge so sharply from that in India? One factor was differences in political economy. In Lanka, only a small proportion of the state's revenue came from taxes on land. From the very beginning of British rule, commercial monopolies and indirect taxes, especially levies on the external trade, provided the foundation for the state's finances. When pressures mounted in Britain for liberal and utilitarian policies to be implemented in British territories overseas, in Lanka these policies had a potential to increase trade and thus the state's coffers. In India, on the other hand, although liberal rhetoric was also employed in the early nineteenth century, the state's revenue was heavily dependent on land taxes that extracted a surplus from farmers. For the British in India, the best way to maintain this flow of revenue was to buttress the established social structure by incorporating and often transforming status distinctions that formed part of the social order. There did not seem to be any immediate benefit from implementing liberal policies in ways that would be likely to reduce, not increase, the state's finances.

The British rejection of caste was also connected to changes in their view of the role of religion, race, and nation in Lankan society and culture. [73] When the British objectified 'caste' in India, they configured it, in Dirks' words, 'in direct relationship to "Hinduism" as a systemic, confessional, all-embracing religious identity.' [74] By the 1830s in Lanka,

in contrast, the British had identified the prevalent religion as a Buddhism that did not endorse caste. Colebrooke believed that the Buddhist abolition of caste 'drew on them the hostility of the Brahmins, and produced the religious wars which depopulated the country and led to the settlement of the Malabars in the northern district of the island.' [75] From the 1830s on, most colonial discourse in Lanka portrayed caste as 'social' or 'national', but not 'religious'. [76] Since the British always worried that undermining religion might lead to unrest, they felt more free about not supporting caste in Lanka than they did in India. Moreover, in Lanka the place of religion in the emerging colonial sociology was less central than in India. [77] After all, the 'native aristocracy' of the southwest, who the British saw as natural rulers, were predominantly Christian. The relative lack of emphasis on caste and religion was connected to yet another distinct feature of the new colonial discourse of the 1830s: the British decided that Lankans, unlike Indians, did have a sense of history. [78] The colonial sociology constructed for Lanka thus differed more fundamentally from Indian models than the mere disavowal of caste. As the nineteenth century progressed, the greater importance of history, nation, and race—and the lesser importance of religion and caste—was taken by many British observers and some middle-class Lankans as indicative of Lanka civilizational superiority compared to India. The journalist John Ferguson encapsulated this general attitude when in 1884 he noted that Ceylon bore the same relationship to India and the rest of Asia as England did to the European continent. [79]

Social and Political History of Caste under Mature Colonialism

Although caste was largely expunged from official rhetoric, and played a much smaller role in public policy than in India, it did not disappear. Caste identification remained important for many Lankans and continued to be significant in administration and politics, more so than an examination of mere discourse would indicate.

In Kandyan areas ascribed status continued to shape many government appointments. Throughout the nineteenth century and beyond most territorial chief headman positions were filled by the Radala, and the rest were held by other Goyigama or, in the north, Vanniar. [80] When a new system of rural local government was introduced in the 1870s, the higher appointments were again confined to the Radala. [81] Intermediate-ranking headmen were also drawn from the Goyigama, preferably from families with a tradition of government service. In 1872, for instance, one official rejected an applicant for such a position because he was 'not of good birth, that is, none of his ancestors were headmen under the Kandian kings.' [82] Non-Goyigama headmen were appointed only for non-Goyigama villages. They were called *durayas,* a term that distinguished them from the *arachchis,* the Goyigama village headmen. Although some non-Goyigama villages prospered in ways that would likely not have been possible before 1832, there was less social mobility in Kandy than elsewhere. [83] The main Lankan challengers to Radala supremacy were outsiders, including Sinhalese and Moor immigrants from the southwest, who came to take advantage of economic opportunities connected to the expansion of the plantation economy. Moreover, some government positions, such as the clerks, translators, and administrators, needed for the district headquarters and courts, required education and skills rare among Kandyans of any caste. These posts were filled by men from outside the region, including non-Goyigama Sinhalese and Jaffna Vellalars.

In Jaffna, Vellalar dominance remained strong, and the important territorial posts were filled by members of this caste. Unlike in Kandy, however, the state received many complaints that Vellalar officials ignored the needs of other groups. [84] At times the British failed to investigate these allegations because it was felt that the policy of not recognizing caste in public made such action inappropriate. Non-Vellalars were sometimes appointed to non-territorial posts, but these appointments in turn often generated protests from Vellalars, many of whom had taken advantage of the colonial educational system and were well qualified to fill posts in the bureaucracy. In the eighteenth century

the Dutch had attempted to limit Vellalar power by appointing headmen from other landholding castes, but the British did not follow this policy with any consistency. In any case, in the course of the nineteenth century these other landholding castes gradually merged with the Vellalar. [85]

In the southwest the social composition of the territorial administration underwent considerable change. [86] Beginning in the 1840s, a number of Karava Salagama and upwardly-mobile Goyigama were appointed as chief headmen. The 'traditional aristocracy' had to compete with these newcomers, and many Goyigama headmen found themselves under the authority of a Karava or Salagama superior. This development, however, did not lead to the 'fusion of the various classes' that some officials desired in the mid-century. [87] The 'first- class' Goyigama maintained their social exclusivity, and continued to exercise much influence. In the nineteenth century, virtually all low- country Sinhalese appointees to the Legislative Council and the civil service belonged to this group. Caste also remained important for the new Colombo-centred middle-class that emerged in the nineteenth century. [88] Non-Goyigama elites did not generally try to hide their caste status. Instead, they denied Goyigama claims to superiority. In the middle of the nineteenth century a number of Karava families from Moratuwa, just south of Colombo, challenged the social position of the leading Goyigama. In 1870s, the most prominent of these families, the de Soysa, was chosen to entertain the visiting Duke of Edinburgh. [89] Among elites, this triumph was widely perceived as a Karava victory over the Goyigama.

From the 1860s onwards, elites employed print culture to make points about caste. The first extended debate took place in the pages of the *Ceylon Examiner* in 186 8. [90] It began with a number of letters about two pending appointments, one for a Mudaliyar of the Governor's Gate, the highest honorary title other than a knighthood that was available for a Sinhalese, and the other for a chief headmanship in the southern province. Before the mid-1840s, these posts had been

monopolized by Goyigamas, but since that time they had been open to Karavas and Salagamas. Letter writers divided themselves into two sides, one which claimed that the government should appoint Goyigamas because 'you cannot *force* the people to respect a man whom they consider their inferior in social position, however clever he may be', and another which argued both that appointments should be made on merit and that in any case the Goyigama were not, by tradition, really the highest caste. [91] Correspondents soon lost sight of the original appointments at stake, and entered into a more general debate about caste. Their main concern was the relative status of the Goyigama and Karava, though the position of other castes, and reflections on caste in general, also received some attention.

A number of features found in this debate foreshadowed the periodic caste controversies that took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. [92] First, despite the absence of caste from colonial discourse, there was a concern that the British might be fooled by inaccurate information about caste. Many writers on both sides of the debate claimed to oppose all caste distinctions, but argued that it was important that Europeans not be misled by their opponents. In fact, when appointments were pending for positions that had previously been monopolised by the Goyigama, it was impossible for the government not to take caste into account, because 'public opinion' interpreted such appointments in caste terms.

Another feature of the *Examiner* debate that proved to be characteristic of later exchanges was the use of a wide range of historical and etymological evidence. Some writers identified the ancestors of the Goyigama and Karava with particular groups attached to Vijaya, the mythical founder of the Sinhalese kingdom, who was said to have arrived in Lanka more than 2000 years earlier. Other writers appealed to precolonial grammars, chronicles, and other texts. Many correspondents also discussed Portuguese, Dutch, and Kandyan administrative practice. Others quoted British authorities. Correspondents had no trouble finding evidence that supported their cases, or in discrediting the evidence of their opponents. One Karava,

for instance, dismissed John Armour's early-nineteenth-century ranking of the Navandanna ('smiths') above the Karava by noting that he 'had personal reasons for his partiality . . . A woman's influence over a lover is very great.' [93]

Finally, the *Examiner* correspondents connected Lankan castes to varna categories. One side asserted that the Karava were Kshatriya and the Goyigama Sudra, the other side that the Goyigama were Vaisya and the Karava Sudra. Some letters referred to other contemporary claims, for instance that the Salagama and Hunu were Brahman, and the Oli ('dancers') Kshatriya. Some of these claims, particularly those made by the Salagama and Karava, dated back to before British rule, but it is not until the mid-nineteenth century that the varna status of different castes was used to produce relative rankings. [94] Earlier claims to Kshatriya or Brahman origins were employed to show that a specific group's status had been higher in the past—they were not used to construct a regional caste hierarchy. The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century appeals to varna were influenced by mainland scholarship that made these categories central to Indian social organization. Caste may have been largely erased and deemed irrelevant in public accounts of Lankan society, but the abstract idea of 'caste' was shaped by a wider colonial discourse centred on the mainland. One *Examiner* correspondent cited H.T. Colebrooke's *Essays on the Religion and Philosophy of the Hindus* as his source for varna, and in later debates some Lankans referred to accounts of caste in Indian government publications. [95]

Caste controversies remained a periodic feature of public life for several decades after the *Examiner* debate. The Goyigama—Karava rivalry remained central, although over time publications appeared that supported the claims of many other castes. Although some publications were in English, most of the writing on caste was in Sinhala. The tone of many exchanges suggests that late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century caste controversies cannot be explained only by elite competition for government jobs—many of the participants in these debates felt that deep issues of status and worth were at stake. Sarcasm was sometimes employed. Even in the *Examiner* debate, which was

relatively tame in this respect, a Goyigama writer noted that the only way one could support the Karava claim to Kshatriya or warrior status was to follow Darwin's theory and say they had evolved from their assault on fish. [96]

There was often a sense that it was in bad taste to speak openly about caste, and most polemical works were published anonymously. Other publications were ostensibly not about caste at all. Historical and legal texts were edited and presented in ways that supported one side or the other. [97] Points were also made in the pages of the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch)*. The scholar Paul Pieris, for instance, published a photograph of a Karava headman's tombstone that bore the image of a fish. [98] All of Pieris' readers knew that the disavowal of the label 'fisher' was central to Karava claims to high status, and Pieris' contribution prompted a reply that argued the fish was a symbol of royalty.

Another indication of the social strength of caste and of its importance beyond family and locality was its continuing importance for the sangha. In the coastal regions of the southwest, non-Goyigama often worshipped at temples where the monk was of their own caste, and disputes among monks sometimes reflected caste competition. At the island-wide level, sangha organization also reflected caste divisions. The Siyam fraternity, based in Kandy, continued to restrict higher ordination to the Goyigama. The other two major fraternities, both based in the southwest, were multi-caste. Leading monks not only participated in caste controversies, but they did so with the patronage of Christian caste-fellows. Weligama Sri Sumangala, a prominent Karava monk who in 1876 argued that the Karava were Kshatriya and thus superior to the Goyigama, had close ties with the Anglican de Soysa family, who were engaged in a fierce struggle for social status with the mainly Anglican Goyigama 'native aristocracy'. [99] Similarly, Hikkaduwe Sumangala, a prominent Goyigama monk who rebutted Weligama's work, had earlier helped E.R. Gooneratne, an Anglican member of the aristocracy, write his contribution to the 1868 *Examiner* debate. [100] Such connections are less surprising when one remembers that, at least

among cities, family ties were more common and socially acceptable across Buddhist—Christian lines than across caste boundaries. [101]

Although the role of caste divisions in the sangha was significant, many Buddhist monks and laymen argued that caste was not endorsed by Buddhism. [102] This discourse, along with the liberal colonial one that also rejected caste, made the rhetorical rejection of caste distinctions respectable and contributed to keeping many references to caste rather elliptical. In practice, many monks and other Buddhist leaders did cooperate across caste lines. Hikkaduwe, for instance, had good relations with the prominent Salagama lay preacher, Migettuvatte Gunananda; and one of his most devoted lay supporters was N.S. Fernando, a Vahumpura ('jaggory makers') businessman. [103] The identification of the Kandyan Buddhist establishment with the Goyigama, however, was never in doubt. In 1886, when a leading Kandyan monk rebuked Hikkaduwe for supporting the low-country fraternities' position on the proper dress for monks, he accused Hikkaduwe of betraying not only the Siyam fraternity but his Goyigama identity. [104] And at the turn of the century, when Fernando received an honorary title from the government, he was ridiculed by Battaramulle Subhuti, another Siyam fraternity monk and a well-known Goyigama propagandist. [105]

In the late nineteenth century, the attitude of some British governors and officials towards caste began to change. In 1859, J. Emerson Tennent, the author of an influential book on Lanka, bemoaned that 'the ascendancy of caste still exercises a baneful influence over the intellectual as well as the material prosperity of the nation.' [106] But there is less liberalism in the 1880 comments of John Douglas, the Auditor-General, who noted that the new system of rural judicial tribunals 'may to some extent be worked for the upholding of caste institutions and prejudices.' [107] Douglas speculated that the tribunals would impose a different punishment on a Goyigama who slapped a Batgam than when the reverse was the case. Douglas continued: 'No doubt this is wrong, but we cannot altogether overlook the deeply ingrained feelings of the

native population on this subject according to which a lasting disgrace would be inflicted by the slap in the latter case, none in the former.' [108] The increasing conservatism of many officials may also be seen in the views of E.B. Denham, expressed in 1912: 'However receptive and imitative the Eastern mind may be, it is still under the influence of thousands of years of prejudice . . . Under the British Government every effort has been made to remove the disabilities of caste as far as they affect the public life of the community, but it is not possible—nor is it desirable—to destroy all records of the past.' [109]

Arthur Gordon, the Governor from 1833 to 1890, was particularly well known for his conservative views. Encouraged by his Maha Mudaliyar, or head of the 'native administration', Gordon adopted the pre-1833 view that the Goyigama aristocrat families of the southwest and the Radala of Kandy formed a hereditary nobility, and were the natural rulers of these parts of Lanka. [110] Gordon was suspicious of Sinhalese officials who did not have this social background, and discriminated against them when making personnel decisions. Although it was politically impossible for Gordon to express his views openly, they became widely known, and were resented by non-Goyigama elites, particularly the Karava. [111] There was never any debate on rejecting the principle of non-recognition of caste, but some later governors also saw a reconstituted aristocracy as a useful conservative prop for their rule. Henry McCallum, an early twentieth-century governor who may have been influenced by Lord Curzon's policies in India, placed great emphasis on annual durbars for the low country Kandyan and Jaffna 'chiefs', who were of course required to wear their 'traditional' dress on these occasions. [112] McCallum sought to use these men to offset the middle class. Like Gordon, he also favoured the Goyigama when making government appointments.

Gordon's policies accentuated caste controversies among the elite—there was a flurry of caste polemics during his governorship. In the two decades after his departure, Sinhalese representation on the Legislative Council moved to the forefront of politics. [113] Before 1889, the practice

had been to appoint only one Sinhalese, and this representative had been drawn from high-status Goyigama families. When the Council was expanded in 1889, provision was made for a second Sinhalese seat, but this was reserved for a Kandyan, who was invariably Radala. Karava and other non-Goyigama elites had since the 1870s expressed dissatisfaction with the Goyigama aristocracy's grip on the most prestigious appointment open to a Sinhalese. In the late nineteenth century, whenever there was a vacancy on the Legislative Council, there were press campaigns that promoted the suitability of various candidates. By 1900, these were supplemented by public meetings. Campaigns generally pitted a 'first-class' Goyigama candidate against one or more non-Goyigama alternatives. But the Karava and other non-Goyigama candidates continued to lose out. Around 1905, Karava politicians increasingly adopted the language of liberalism and advocated introducing the electoral principle for Legislative Council representation. The *Ceylon Standard*, which often spoke for elite Karava interests, stated that the government's non-recognition of caste was meaningless so long as caste domination was maintained in the Legislative Council. [114] The reformers believed that Karava candidates would do well in elections given that the franchise would be restricted by property and educational requirements. The traditional aristocracy, secure in their appointments, resisted this change.

Even though caste was important in elite politics, McCallum was the only governor who spoke openly about it, and even he did so in rather abstract terms. The contrast between government policy in India and Lanka remained sharp. On the mainland, the British used the census to define, count, and even rank individual groups. This information was employed widely, in fields from representative politics to criminal law. In Lanka, on the other hand, caste was never enumerated in any of the modern censuses that begin in 1871. The compiler of the 1891 census noted that caste 'was not included because it is not as important as in India and because it would have led the people to believe it was important, while the "declared policy" of the government is to disregard it'. [115] The government did not even have an official list of castes. In

1903, when it revised its glossary of 'native words', castes were listed without their 'traditional' occupations. [116]

Caste was almost never mentioned in any judicial proceeding, and no legislative or municipal government seats were ever created to represent a particular caste interest. There were few contexts where caste appeared in official records. Around the turn of the century some scattered information on caste was published in a few gazetteers covering some Kandyan districts, but in this region the British were generally content with making a distinction between the Goyigama and the rest, without paying much attention to the specifics of caste identity. [117] The only official publication where caste was mentioned on a regular basis was the *Hue and Cry*, a bulletin that was circulated by the police, which named the caste of individuals wanted by the authorities. [118] However, unlike in India, caste was never used to identify hereditary criminal groups. Instead, legislation in Lanka followed the metropolitan model and identified 'habitual criminals' on the basis of individual behaviour rather than their membership in a criminal caste or tribe. [119]

In public discourse, Lankan elites too were often reluctant to place much emphasis on caste. There were no caste associations, though it was known that some organizations named after particular villages, towns, or interest groups spoke only or primarily for one caste. [120] They represented their relatively well-off members, and did not attempt to promote the welfare or change the behaviour of ordinary people. Moreover, at the very top of the Colombo elite there was considerable inter-caste mixing at social functions, though the low-country Goyigama aristocracy usually remained aloof. The lack of vertical institutional links along lines of caste raises the question of how far elite conflicts reflected a wider sense of caste solidarity. Patrick Peebles and A.P. Kannangara argue that these disputes were of concern only to a narrow social group at the top of the social order, and had little meaning for the bulk of their caste fellows. [121] They point out that polemicists and politicians concentrated on issues that were of concern to elites who had common class interests, and who used caste to

compete for social status. Their argument is by and large convincing, but caste debates may have had some meaning for at least some humbler members of the groups concerned. Although castes did not function as corporate bodies, caste links did play a role in patron—client ties between urban and semi-urban elites and those of lower economic status. In particular, most Colombo-based elite families kept ties with the villages to which they were linked by kinship.

Even though colonial policy makers generally took little notice of caste, it continued to matter in the everyday social life of most Sinhalese. Many people changed their names because, in the words of one official, 'the name is an index of respectability and position.' [122] This practice was particularly common in towns and among low-country Sinhalese who settled in Kandyan areas. Petitions sent to the government after the 1911 census also point to a concern with caste status. [123] One group of villagers, for instance, argued that their hamlet should not have been enumerated separately, but included as part of an adjoining village. Since the hamlet's name implied that it was inhabited by low-caste persons, the villagers feared their sons and daughters would not have trouble finding marriage partners. Another petition was received from an individual who complained that the village *arachchi* had entered his property on the census return under a name that indicated it belonged to a Batgam. The writer claimed that this action was an attempt to disgrace him.

As in the early nineteenth century, higher castes sometimes ob-jected when lower castes acted as if they did not know their place. In 1867, for instance, 48 Karava were arrested at Bentota for stopping a Hena wedding procession that was, in the words of a newspaper correspondent, 'in the modern style'. [124] Twenty years later, after a man died during a Goyigama attempt to prevent the male members of an Oli wedding party from wearing combs, one official noted that 'these caste distinctions were dying out but recently the high caste people have been attempting to enforce them, even by force if necessary.' [125] In both the low country and Kandy, marriages or liaisons that violated caste norms could also lead to trouble. [126] The Rodi in particular were held in

widespread abhorrence and contempt. In the 1870s a Kandyan rural council proposed a local law that would have made it a crime for a Rodi woman to come into the presence of a Goyigama when clothed above the waist, and a 1905 commission examining Rodi education concluded that integration was impractical and proposed providing separate instruction. [127]

This violence and conflict did not reflect the major caste cleavages among Sinhalese elites, especially that between the Karava and Goyigama. Most local conflicts over status were between service castes and castes that sought to keep them in their place. Other affrays between castes, which were often set off by economic disputes, seem to have had even less connection with elite concerns. [128] When caste conflict involved all social classes, it remained a local affair. When it had a wider spatial significance, only elites were involved. The two forms of caste competition usually failed to overlap.

Caste violence was more common in Jaffna than elsewhere, especially around the beginning of the twentieth century. [129] The point of dispute was often the right of lower castes to wear particular types of dress or to use certain forms of decoration, especially at marriages. In 1902, the Government Agent at Jaffna explained such disturbances as the result of 'Vellalars resenting the adoptions of customs hitherto peculiar to them only, as of wearing jewellery, riding in carriages, using tom-toms at social functions etc., by the low-caste Nalawas and others, who have become rich and decline to follow the old "customs". [130] In the nineteenth century, some non-Vellalar from Jaffna worked as labourers in other parts of the island, and accumulated wealth that would not have been available to them if they had stayed in the peninsula. [131] Not all these disputes pitted the Vellalar against lower castes; there were also conflicts between middling castes, such as the Karaiyar, and low castes. Moreover, sometimes attacks were carried out by low castes who were still allied with the local Vellalars.

Among Sinhalese, the availability of a Buddhist tradition that discounted caste reinforced the viability of the liberal colonial critique.

It also made 'modernist' Buddhist activities attractive to upwardly-mobile castes. In Jaffna, in contrast, nineteenth-century Hindu 'modernist' movements were connected closely to Vellalar identity and dominance. [132] As a result, there was less public space for caste competition. The periodic controversies over the presence of low- caste teachers and students in schools was another indication of the continued intense caste feeling in the peninsula. [133] These disputes were fuelled not only by a reluctance to associate with non-Vellalar, but an idea that education was inappropriate for the lower castes. This issue remained prominent as late as the 1930s.

The Vellalar were widely regarded as equivalent to the Goyigama. Indeed, until the mid-century Goyigamas were normally referred to in English by the term 'Vellalar'. It was also quite common to regard the Karaiyar as equivalent to the Karava. A notable example of 'cross- racial' caste rhetoric is a long pamphlet published in 1890 by G.A. Dharmaratna, a Karava lawyer. [134] Dharmaratna's attack on Goyigama dominance explicitly linked the Goyigama with the Vellalar, and the Karava with the Karaiyar. He portrayed his work as a response to a speech given by Ponnambalam Arunachalam, a prominent and wellborn Tamil civil servant who in 1885 had declared to a predominantly Sinhalese audience that the Goyigama was the highest Sinhalese caste.

These cross-racial caste links re-emerged during the first island- wide election, in 1911, for the new 'educated Ceylonese' seat on the Legislative Council. [135] This pitted Arunachalam's brother, Ponnambalam Ramanathan, against Marcus Fernando, a medical doctor and leading Karava who was trying to become the first non-Goyigama Sinhalese to sit on the Legislative Council. The franchise for this election was drawn narrowly—in the end 2626 votes were cast island-wide. The campaign lasted nearly a year, and public meetings attracted many people who could not vote. Fernando's supporters spoke the language of liberalism, but Ramanathan's campaign responded with accusations that Fernando represented 'a pernicious caste clique'. [136] Among the Sinhalese, Fernando received some support from the lower

castes and Goyigamas who were on bad terms with Ramanathan's aristocratic supporters, but Ramanathan not only garnered most of the Goyigama vote but also received Salagama support. By this time the Karava elite had become so powerful that many Salagama felt that an alliance with the Goyigama better served their interests. Only about one-third of the electorate was Tamil, but Ramanathan won a decisive victory. This result flew in the face of the dominant British discourse on Lankan society, which consistently emphasized race or nation as superordinate, religion as secondary but significant, and caste as ephemeral.

Conclusion

This article argues that 'caste' in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Lanka fell within the standard range of regional variation found in social organization in South Asia generally, and that British perceptions of caste in Lanka and India were also similar. The history of caste in the two places diverges in the 1830s, when the British in Lanka decided to disregard caste in public. No such decision was taken in India, where caste, along with religion, was in the late nineteenth century objectified and used increasingly in administration and in politics. In Lanka, caste identity remained important in many contexts, but it did not have a significant role in a colonial discourse that justified British power. Nor was it much employed in colonial administration. Caste did, however, continue to serve as a force in social organization and as a mark of status in both middle-class and underclass life.

What broader lessons can be drawn from this comparison between Lanka and India? One the one hand, this account does confirm the point made in much recent scholarship that colonial understandings were central in shaping modern South Asian identities. Present-day differences in standard ideas about caste in Lanka and India are not due to long-standing contrasts in social organization, but can be traced to the consequences of different decisions about caste that the British took in the early nineteenth century, the so-called 'age of reform'. Although the British administration in Lanka did not escape the late-nineteenth-century colonial desire to built a more scientific knowledge of subject

peoples, the absence of caste in Lankan colonial discourse was maintained.

The comparison between Lanka and India does not, however, support the more ambitious claims made by some 'postcolonial' or 'post-Orientalist' scholars. Just because caste faded from Lankan colonial discourse did not mean that it faded from history. Caste continued to play an important role in social life, partly because colonial policy did not always match discourse, and partly because there was a history of caste outside British concerns. There are some quite clear continuities in caste competition and conflict between the periods before and after the radical shift in the colonial discourse on caste that took place in the 1830s. Equally importantly, it is possible to identify 'modern' efforts to assert caste identity that both reflected the new epistemological possibilities of imagined communities, and which ran counter to the dominant colonial discourse on caste, which denied its relevance for Lanka. This suggests that colonial discourse may not have been quite so all-encompassing an assault on South Asian culture as some writers, such as Dirks, suggest. Rather than seeing the modern objectification of identities only as facilitating imperial domination by colonizing the minds of South Asians and enabling the destruction of 'indigenous' notions of 'community', it might be more useful to look at the objectification as part of a process of inserting some ideas of modernity into existing social orders. The new ideas were important not only because they were tools for asserting power, but also because they were effective in resisting power, and because they were able to draw on non-modern (not necessarily anti-modern or even premodern) notions of community in different ways at different times. The modern idea of 'caste', then, may well be an invention, but it is an invention that draws from the past and has been used by all sorts of people for all sorts of purposes at different times. Much the same might be said about almost any other type of modern identity—nation, race, religion, or whatever—not only in Sri Lanka and South Asia, but elsewhere, in both the colonized and non-colonized worlds.

8

Sitting on the School Verandah

The Ideology and Practice of 'Untouchable' Educational Protest in Late Nineteenth-Century Western India*

Philip Constable

In 1882 the Indian Education Commission affirmed that all government-aided schools should be open to all castes and communities. It stated:

> The educational institutions of government are intended by us to be open to all classes and we cannot depart from a principle which is essentially sound and the maintenance of which is of first importance. It is not impossible that in some cases, the enforcement of the principle may be followed by a withdrawal of a portion of the scholars, but it is sufficient to remark that those persons who object to its practical enforcement will be at liberty to withhold their contributions and apply their funds to the formation of schools on a different basis. [1]

On the very next pages of the report, however, this affirmation was strongly qualified:

> But even in the case of government or board schools, the principle affirmed by us must be applied with caution. It is not desirable for masters or inspectors to endeavour to force on a social change which with judicious treatment will be accepted by society. If the low-caste community seek an entrance into the cess school, their rights must be firmly maintained, especially in the secondary institutions where there is no alternative of a special school for them to attend. It is, however, undesirable to urge them to claim a right about which they are themselves indifferent. [2]

S. Nurullah and J.E Naik characterized this educational strategy as 'a policy of compromise and slow but persistent attack' on social and religious prejudices on the subject of untouchability, which 'began to show valuable results in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.' They argued that 'once the public realized that threats direct or indirect, would not make government yield on this point, it slowly gave up its opposition and began to accept the presence of untouchable pupils in schools as an inevitable corollary of the new education which they so keenly desired.' [3] Nurullah and Naik's emphasis on the role of the colonial government in promoting untouchable education has, however, been substantially modified in subsequent years, and in large part the mantle of promoter of untouchable educational development has been shifted from the colonial government and bestowed on missionary institutions. [4] In consequence, the role of the 'militant missionary' has become enshrined in many texts as the principal dynamic behind untouchable educational and social change, such as in the works of Duncan Forrester and G.A. Oddie. [5] More recently, growing recognition of the limitations imposed on missionaries by the Indian social context has led to a qualification of this militancy, such as in the work of Koji Kawashima and Dick Kooiman, and the emphasis has increasingly shifted on to the determination of missionary activities by traditional Indian social and political structures, for example in the works of Susan Bayly and Henriette Bugge. [6] This article relates in part to this latter perspective and challenges the primacy which earlier analyses have given to Western institutional agency (be it governmental

or missionary) as the force behind untouchable educational change in late-nineteenth-century western India. It is argued that the principal agents of the social and educational change experienced by untouchable communities were not by and large colonial officials or even missionaries (although they could at times be supportive), but untouchable Hindus and untouchable Christian converts themselves. In bringing to the forefront this dynamism of untouchable educational ideology and practice in western India, this article, however, also questions the common emphasis of Bayly, Kooiman, and Bugge that low-caste Hindus used missionary instruction (and conversion) solely to promote their social mobility by Sanskritization, or its replication in Christian 'caste' forms. It is argued in this article that, at times, low-caste Hindus sought to use missionary education (and conversion) to develop indigenous ideologies/protests which aimed at freedom from caste structures, disabilities, and untouchable discrimination. While the arguments of Kooiman, Bayly, and Bugge recognize in varying degrees that low-caste groups incorporated and transcended colonial (missionary) forms for their own purposes, it is argued here that these authors seem to neglect the existence and dynamism of indigenous ideologies for radical social transformation which were also generated in part by this process of incorporation and transcendence.

In elaborating this interpretation of untouchable educational development this article examines the interaction of the four principal groups involved in determining untouchable educational development in the localities of Bombay Presidency in the period between 1880 and 1900 when caste structures and disabilities have been seen to have become increasingly rigid. These four main groups comprise caste Hindu parents and officials of local schools, Protestant Christian missionaries, Bombay government officials, and, most importantly, untouchable parents and activists themselves. The interaction of these groups is analysed principally in three representative cases of educational discrimination on the grounds of untouchability in late-nineteenth-century western India. The first is a case study of a dispute between the Bombay Church Missionary Society in Manmad and the Manmad local board school in Nasik district in 1884-5. It focuses

particularly on the ambivalence of many colonial government administrators on untouchable educational rights in the light of the established practice of 'downward filtration of education'. The second case study analyses the violent attempts of the caste Hindu *patel* of Ranjangao Ganpati (Sirur taluka, Pune district) to close down the local American Marathi Mission School in 1880-7, and indicates the growing changes that untouchable use of missionary education could create within rural-caste Hindu society by the late nineteenth century. The third case study is a documentary of untouchable protest to gain access to a government primary school in Dapoli, Ratnagiri district, in 1892—1901. It emphasizes the growing strength and tenacity of untouchable protest in some areas of Bombay Presidency by the 1890s, and stresses the Hindu—Christian syncretic construction of untouchable ideology, which gave this educational protest its radical dynamism. Finally, within the context of a review of the historiographical literature on government and missionary educational activities in India, it is argued that while some ad hoc alterations of the educational structure by colonial officials gave the semblance of untouchable inclusion in government schools, government ambivalence on untouchable education generally facilitated the continuance of a predominantly caste Hindu construction of education and society in late-nineteenth-century western India. Moreover, it is suggested that while missionaries provided educational institutions for untouchable students, the demand for such institutions was driven by untouchable communities rather than led by radical missionary social agendas. The social protest which emerged from such education, though often supported by missionaries in protection of their (potential) con-gregations, was largely initiated by untouchables themselves. Although often historiographically characterized as submissive or even ignored in histories of the late nineteenth century, some untouchable groups in western India led an increasingly radical and widespread (although often unsuccessful) challenge in ideological and practical terms to their educational exclusion from government schools and to wider conservative trends in late-nineteenth-century western India.

I

Soon after the Education Commission of 1882, conflict between the Church Missionary Society and the local board school at Manmad in Nasik district in 1884—5 revealed the uncertainty and ambivalence of colonial officials, both in recognizing and controlling educational discrimination against untouchable students. Prior to the Education Commission, there had already been substantial opposition to untouchable education not only from caste Hindu parents and an outraged Indian press, but also from colonial administrators like T.S. Hamilton, District Assistant Collector in Ahmednagar, who, in July 1880, opposed the directive issued by H.P. Jacob, Educational Inspector, North-East Division, that Mahars and Mangs (who were regarded as untouchables) be admitted to all government schools in the northern division of Bombay Presidency. [7] Hamilton purported that similar steps should not be taken to admit untouchable students to a school in Rahuri, Ahmednagar district, as it would be offensive to caste Hindus who would withdraw their children, resulting in the closure of the school. [8] Even the Director of Public Instruction K.M. Chatfield's attitude was more ambivalent than his outward support of Jacob would have led one to suppose. He wrote: 'No order of government will amend matters. It is very desirable not to draw attention to the subject, because the opinions of native society are day by day changing and becoming more liberal and tolerant. And any government order will draw a hard and fast line which will fix the standard beyond which opinion will not attempt to go; whereas if the matter is left to the local committees, the numbers will gradually advance beyond any standards that government could now lay down, without an outcry from the native press.' [9]

Other colonial administrators were more outspoken in their opposition. Like Hamilton in Ahmednagar, the Bombay High Court Judge, West, for example, emphasized to the Education Commission in 1882, 'the impropriety and impolicy of forcing high-caste Hindus and others against their feelings to sit with Dheds and others like them in the same place.' [10] As a result, when the Education Commission stated in 1882 that 'it is not desirable for masters or inspectors to endeavour to

force on a social change', it effectively meant that an ambivalence in policy directives and practice was condoned and accepted. As the case of Manmad emphasized in the mid-1880s, the Education Commission had generally done little to make colonial officials more attentive or aware of educational discrimination on the grounds of untouchability or more assertive in taking definitive measures to counter such stigmatization.

In January 1884 the new brahman schoolmaster appointed to the local board vernacular school at Manmad was alleged by Rev. Alfred Mainwaring, Superintendent of the Church Mission Society, Malegaum, to have been encouraging students to abandon the Church Mission Society's Anglo-vernacular school at Manmad in favour of the local board vernacular school, thereby destroying the previously harmonious relations between the schools. [11] After visiting the local board school in Manmad, the Deputy Educational Inspector in Nasik, B.R. Sahasrabuddhe, argued that the new local board school committee had been simply trying to improve the school which had been damaged by the absence of the previous master on locust duty. Moreover, he indicated that only two students had been attracted away from the mission school and not twenty as Mainwaring maintained. [12] As a result, the Educational Inspector of the North-East Division, H.P Jacob, warned the new master not to deal unfairly with the mission school, while Mainwaring was instructed that parents were free to send their children to whichever school they chose. The conflict in Manmad developed further, however, when, in response to a petition from thirty-five caste Hindus in Manmad in January 1884, Jacob granted permission to the Manmad local board vernacular school to open an English class in direct competition with the Anglo-vernacular mission school. [13] Mainwaring protested to Jacob in March 1884 that the population of Manmad was only 3786, with a likelihood of only 35 boys being available to learn English, which made a second English class, in addition to the mission's Anglo-vernacular school of 50-60 students, a provocative and unnecessary development. Moreover, Mainwaring indicated that it was strictly against government policy to open a

government or local board school/class in the same locality as a state-aided mission school because it duplicated efforts and wasted funds. [14] Jacob concurred with Mainwaring on this interpretation and cancelled the English class. [15]

The matter might have rested there if the caste Hindu inhabitants of Manmad had not again petitioned Jacob on 22 March 1885 emphasizing their reasons for wanting a separate English class: namely, that Christian instruction was objectionable to caste Hindus as it allowed untouchable education and untouchables to enter the same classroom as caste Hindu students. [16] Such was the petitioners' objection that the leading Manmad petitioner, Govind Ramakrishna Deo, indicated that they, with support from an influential brahman from Vinchur, would pay Rs 15-20 per month in addition to tuition fees to defray the cost of the new English class. [17] The root of this religious objection to the education of untouchable boys was alleged by Mainwaring to have been almost solely instilled in the Manmad petitioners by the new brahman schoolmaster of the local board school who was supported by funds from Vinchur brahmans outside the local Manmad community.

Rather than seeing the source of the second petition in the direct objection of the Manmad petitioners to untouchable students, Jacob, however, interpreted the purport of the petition as a caste Hindu objection to taking instruction in an alien Christian religion (of which one of many objectionable facets for caste Hindus was untouchable education). In this light, Jacob wrote to Mainwaring that while the particular objection to untouchable students was inadmissible, the general religious issue of objection to Christian instruction in Manmad might be solved by implementing an (unsanctioned) Education Commission proposal to render Christian education 'optional' in missionary schools where the religious conscience of the students and their parents was opposed to Christian teachings. [18] Jacob indicated that if Mainwaring compromised on this point, the caste Hindus of Manmad could have no valid objection to the mission school or a reason for a new English class. Otherwise, Jacob argued, the needs of

the caste Hindu community in Manmad were not sufficiently met, and whatever the student numbers available, the government would be justified in allowing a new class or school. [19] Jacob's motives were finding an alternative justification for a separate class in terms of caste Hindu religious objection to Christian instruction, or, more subtly, as a result of his early experience in the 1880s, he sought to remove caste Hindu religious objection to Christian instruction in order to lay bare the untouchable issue at its heart. Mainwaring sought advice from Robert Squire, Secretary to the Church Mission Society in Bombay, but in effect Jacob must have realized that the reply was a foregone conclusion since to render Christian instruction optional in missionary schools was to abjure the very purpose of the missionary educational enterprise itself. Squire sought to return the problem to its original source. He pointed out that Jacob needed to confront the real issue which was the objection of the thirty-five petitioners in Manmad to the presence of Mahar and Mang students in the mission school. Effectively, the government really had to consider the fact that its position in opening a new class would simply be a concession to caste prejudice against untouchable students. In Squire's opinion, caste Hindu arguments of conscientious objection to Christianity were no more than a smokescreen for this discrimination. [20] As a result, Jacob requested K.M. Chatfield, Director of Public Instruction, to refer the matter to the Bombay government for consideration.

Chatfield, however, refused to refer the matter for wider government consideration, and decided to sort it out himself. While Jacob had been wrangling with the missionaries for a compromise, the Manmad caste Hindu petitioners, who were still smarting from Jacob's earlier volte face on the new class, had petitioned the Collector of Nasik, W. Woodward, in September 1884. Woodward stated, in contrast to Jacob's vacillation, that while the people of Manmad definitely needed the Education Department to manage their efforts, they merely wanted an English class at their own expense to be attached to the present local board vernacular school (and not a new school itself), and that, therefore, this should be authorized. [21] Chatfield chose the logic of Woodward's

verdict, and on the basis of what he believed to be eighteen years of practical precedent, sanctioned the new English class on the grounds that the government should encourage initiatives in secondary education funded by private sources. [22] His appended proviso that the new English class in the local board school in Manmad should not exclude untouchable students was his only recognition of the issue at stake in which his decision clearly favoured the caste Hindu petitioners. Squire again objected that the caste antipathy generated by the new brahman schoolmaster of the local board school could only serve to deprive the mission school of caste Hindu students, leading to the closure of the mission school through loss of its grant-in-aid from the government, and the consequent exclusion of the untouchable students from education as they would not be allowed into the new English class or the local board school, in spite of government policy directives. [23] Chatfield's decision seemed to set a precedent for a widespread attack by orthodox caste Hindus, not only on missionary educational programmes, but also on untouchable educational rights.

Chatfield's decision could not, therefore, go unchallenged by the Church Missionary Society. Mainwaring petitioned Chatfield in a letter which showed such a detailed knowledge of Bombay educational regulations that it clearly angered Chatfield. [24] Citing chapter and verse, Mainwaring repeated the Church Mission Society's case against Chatfield's decision to open the new class, namely that government rules did not allow a competing government school/class to be opened against a missionary school where there were insufficient students in a locality. Against Jacob's decision, he reaffirmed his earlier views that the government could not accept the religious claims of the caste Hindu petitioners against the mission school when they had made no protest in the past. He also indicated that Jacob's ruling was based on an unsanctioned Education Commission proposal on conscientious objection. Above all, he pointed out that the petitioners' essential aims were unacceptable to the government because they sought to exclude untouchable students from education by 'crushing out' their mission school through the secession of the caste Hindu students. Whereas in

most cases caste Hindu students abandoned schools when untouchable students were placed in them, in the case of Manmad caste Hindu students had accepted missionary schooling with untouchable students when no other school was available, but seceded and tried to close the missionary school once alternative education under a brahman master was provided. Chatfield was enraged by Mainwaring's challenge to his authority and inverted Mainwaring's legal and moral arguments to his own purpose. He wrote: 'People may differ on the question whether religious teaching should be enforced in mission schools, but no one outside the Committee [of the Church Mission Society, Bombay] can believe it to be right to enforce religious teaching and at the same time deprive [parents] of the chance of educating their children elsewhere.' [25]

In terse self-justification, Chatwick refused to recognize that he was in effect favouring caste Hindu religious prejudices, and fell back on the argument that not only was it morally wrong to force Christian education on unwilling Hindu students, but also it was well within government regulations to allow the petitioners to improve their local board vernacular school with an English class at their own expense. [26]

In spite of Chatfield's refusal to refer the matter to the government, a petition from Squire to J.B. Richey, Secretary to Government, brought the matter to the attention of the Governor of Bombay, D.J.M. Reay. [27] Reay consulted the government regulations cited by Mainwaring against Chatfield in some detail and sought to bring Jacob's religious argument to reinforce Chatfield's decision. He argued the case for a new class on the basis of a caveat which he found in the regulations to the effect that the refusal of a separate government school/class where there was already an aided mission school was a binding rule only when there were 'no practical difficulties'. He felt, however, that 'objectionable religious instruction' was a practical difficulty. [28] Reay, however, seems to have glimpsed beyond the Christian-Hindu religious controversy and to have perceived the 'caste issue' at its origin. He surmised that the whole issue may have been created and caste sentiments stirred up by the new schoolmaster's attempts in Manmad to increase his student

numbers. He, therefore, qualified his judgement by advising a test of the caste Hindu petitioners' conviction for the new class by making the petitioners pay fully for the new class, while preventing any students who had previously accepted missionary education from changing to this new class. Meanwhile, untouchable children were to be allowed to enter the new English class if it was under government management. [29] These qualifications in the Governor's proposal seemed to reflect further the ambiguity of the Education Commission's policy directives on untouchable education, but his qualifications were largely lost in the Education Department resolution issued on 2 March 1885 which voiced entirely a combination of Chatfield's position on private educational finance and Jacob's religious justification for the new class on the basis of conscientious objection. [30]

In response, as Squire endeavoured to point out for a third time, the only 'practical difficulty' was that the Bombay government seemed to wish to misconstrue or ignore the cause of the case. The issue, for the people of Manmad, was not Christian religious instruction per se, which they had accepted for several years, but the attendance of untouchable boys in the mission school: 'the caste question is the real religious question, religious objection and caste are the same issue.' Squire continued to indicate that the government, by favouring a small minority in Manmad with a new class on the grounds of 'religious objection' or private finance, missed the point of the debate which was the objection of caste Hindus to untouchable students. By its interpretation of the Indian Education Commission's policy, the government was allowing caste Hindu discrimination. Now that the class had, however, been authorized by the government on 2 March 1885, Squire indicated that, at the very least, if there was to be a separate class in Manmad which was based on objection to untouchable students, it could not be a government or local board class (as this contravened government rules which refused government aid to schools/classes that did not admit untouchable students). It had to be in the form of a private class under private management and funding (which could set its own rules). [31] Jacob too had suffered a slight

change of heart now that the caste Hindu petitioners had secured their class. He too stressed that the attachment of the English class to a local board school gave it governmental prestige (while being a private class). It would, therefore, be more equitable to the mission school to establish the class as a separately managed and funded school, with a right to apply for a government grant-in-aid, like the mission school, if it did not exclude untouchable students. [32] These arguments on the nature of the new class/school were also intensified by the replacement of Chatfield (on leave) by W. Lee-Warner, as Acting Director of Public Instruction. Lee-Warner was known for his sympathy for the education of lower castes, and in controversion of Chatfield's decision he backed the position which Squire and Jacob had finally reached regarding the private and non-governmental nature of the new class. [33] The Governor-in-Council, however, summarily dismissed Lee-Warner's suggestion as further obfuscation. He pointed out that Lee-Warner had failed to see the pressure that was being put on the caste Hindu community to accept mission schools, and that, in the process, Lee-Warner had departed from the principles of government neutrality in religious matters. [34] Where Lee-Warner's proposal had at least sought to strike a balance, Reay seemed to favour the rights of the caste Hindu community in Manmad in contravention of the very principles of neutrality in religious matters which he himself advocated.

When the Church Mission Society, Free Church of Scotland Mission, Methodist Episcopal Church, and the American Marathi Mission jointly petitioned the Government of India in August 1885, the Government of Bombay found itself in a difficult situation. [35] Reay, Governor of Bombay, marginalized the untouchable discrimination, which was the source of the case, and excluded Lee-Warner's solutions from the papers. Rather, he emphasized Chatfield's and Jacob's earlier arguments that the Bombay government was bound to accept financial gifts from benefactors for education, especially if they prevented students from being forced into mission schools against their consciences. [36] On the basis of the evidence presented, the Governor-General came to agree with the Government of Bombay's actions in

opening the new class. They insisted, however, that the class could not be attached to the local board school and had to become a separate private school, which, ironically, was exactly Squire's and Lee-Warner's previous suggestion. [37] The missionary victory was, nonetheless, mixed. They had ultimately been forced into accepting the opening of an English school, but it was opened on the terms that Squire and Lee-Warner had suggested: that is as a self-funded and private institution, competing (if it admitted untouchable students) for a grant-in-aid on equal terms with the missionary school. They, nonetheless, lost the argument on the question of religious education and conscientious objection. Above all, however, their consistent and principal contention that the new school/class should not be opened as its formation was based on discrimination against untouchable students was almost completely neglected in favour of a policy which, in spite of the Bombay government's statements about untouchable welfare, upheld, first and foremost, caste Hindu perceptions and needs. Such ambivalent official attitudes clearly did not allow for a 'persistent attack' on social and religious prejudices regarding untouchability. At best they reflected a failure to recognize discrimination on the grounds of untouchability, and at worst they seemed to suggest a belief in the superior merits of caste Hindu education and a search for convenient administrative solutions within which to accommodate caste Hindu values and perspectives.

The reasons behind this official failure to promote untouchable education in this period were essentially twofold; one pragmatic, the other ideological. The Collector of Ratnagiri, WW Drew, provided the pragmatic reason in explaining his failure to include untouchable students in school classrooms in Ratnagiri, Thana and Kolaba districts in the 1880s and 1890s. He stated: 'I found it was no use trying to get [the exclusion] remedied, because the educational authorities are against anything that might endanger the number of pupils on their books, which an order that the low-caste boys were to be admitted into the same room as the others would certainly do.' [38]

The same situation had certainly been experienced by Jacob due to his acceptance of untouchable education in 1880. Local officials like Drew and Jacob found themselves faced with the insoluble dilemma of having to maintain school and student numbers while recognising the right of untouchable students to enter a school with the inevitable consequence of the withdrawal of its caste Hindu students. The dilemma of local officials was openly recognized in the Bombay press. The *Native Opinion*, for example, wrote in 1882: 'The extension of education downwards is very much retarded by want of funds. Every deputy inspector is expected to show an increase in the numbers of schools and scholars in the district, while the grant remains fixed . . . It would, we dare say, rudely shake the comfortable notions of our government about the so-called progress of our schools, if some honest deputy inspectors let them into the secrets of their administration.' [39] As a result, government officials, as in Manmad, often took the line of least resistance, which was to overlook, to leave unchallenged, or to find administrative compromises to educational discrimination against untouchable students, although this was a compromise which often favoured caste Hindu values and society. Many officials seem simply to have turned a blind eye or to have been unaware of caste Hindu exclusion of untouchable students. Thus, at Revdanda village in Kolaba district in July 1893, the caste Hindu villagers intimidated and persecuted the parents of two Mahar boys sent to the local school until they withdrew the children. The untouchable villagers petitioned the Collector of Kolaba to order the Superintendent of Police and *mamletdar* of the taluka to re-admit the boys to the school and end the intimidation of the parents. The Mahar petitioners, moreover, particularly pointed out that both the Deputy Collector and the *mamletdar* had actually been in Revdanda on the day the Mahar boys were removed from the school, but had not appeared to have heard of the exclusion. [40] Other government officials simply seemed to allow what they saw as inevitable under the circumstances. In 1893, for example, the Educational Inspector, Northern Division, E. Giles, stated in relation to untouchable attempts to enter Ahmedabad schools that 'to place untouchable, students in a school was effectively to empty that

school of caste Hindu students, and that neither Educational Department, Collector or even the Government of India could alter this situation by mere order or regulation. The only hope was that higher caste education over time would remove the prejudice.' [41]

A second cause of failure was the ideological perspective of some officials which demonstrated a clear moral preference for caste Hindu villagers over the educational aspirations of untouchable students. These perceptions were reflected in the views of Giles who intimated at a negligent untouchable attitude to education, only partly determined by poverty: 'These Dheds, Bhangis, Chamars and Khalpa are most indifferent to education, that even when the children come to school, they rarely remain there any time, their attendance is usually most irregular. They see no benefit in education . . . and the problem of life is with them so pressing that parents cannot afford to lose the earnings of children so soon as they are able to earn anything.' [42] Others, like P.C.H. Snow, Assistant Collector of Pune, were critical of untouchable labourers who rose above their menial village status. Like in many cases in Ahmednagar district in the 1880s, Snow claimed that:

> Soon after a missionary school is set up for the Mahars in a village, they affect a sort of independence and self-sufficiency, and decline to carry out the legitimate orders of the village officers. An intolerable friction ensues at once as the village officers generally proceed to cut off their *haqs,* and occasionally are so incensed with their proceedings as to incite the Mangs to attack them. That the village officers are placed in an awkward position cannot be denied. The slightest proceeding on their part, is reported as *zulum* and carried to the missionary to whom the Mahars look for all sorts of benefits. Thence the complaint finds its way to the collector. It must be borne in mind that the patel in these cases has little power of resistance even if in the right. The missionary is sure to believe the words of his own converts and unless the district authorities take a different view of the matter, the Patel must go to the wall. [43]

Not only did Snow's sympathies lie with the caste Hindu village officials, he also had a very low opinion of Mahar character: 'I have

never met a more mendacious and unreliable set of men than the Christian Mahars. No falsehood or exaggeration seems too great for them: in giving up their own creed, they seem to relinquish at the same time all the moral restraint which before kept them within bounds.' [44]

Such negative views of untouchables were in part a consequence of educational strategies transposed to western India from the British context. As David Newsome has indicated, British educationalists like Thomas Arnold had fashioned widely influential educational theories which interrelated 'good learning' and 'godliness'. Education (good learning) was a 'system of instruction towards moral perfection' (godliness) of the individual, with this moral perfection defined in terms of Victorian middle-class values. [45] It was a short step for educationalists in India like Chatfield to conceptualize the same qualities in the higher 'godly and learned' brahman/*jatis*. As E.H. Gumperz and Ellen McDonald have shown, educational policy in western India in the nineteenth century had been aimed largely at educating higher castes in such principles in the vague hope that this education would filter down to the lower castes and gradually reform Hindu society in the process. [46] Nurullah and Naik see the Wood Despatch of 1854 as the 'death blow' to this failed policy of downward educational filtration, and they envisage the Education Commission in 1882 as the implementation of a distinct compromise for the integration of untouchable students into the caste Hindu-dominated educational and social structure. [47] Events in the 1880s, like those in Manmad and elsewhere, however, suggest that in practice discrimination against untouchable students continued to be the rule, and 'godliness and good learning' were largely seen by colonial administrators to be the prerogative of the higher *jatis*.

'British officers', wrote Lee-Warner, Commissioner, Southern Division, in 1887, in comments on untouchable education, 'have, I regret to say, withstood this natural and healthy movement.' [48] In the 1880s, Lee-Warner belonged to a minority of officials holding sympathetic views towards low-caste and untouchable education. As Acting Director of Public Instruction during Chatfield's absence in late 1885, Lee-Warner was subjected to a personal tirade of criticism from the Sarvajanik

Sabha and much of the Bombay Presidency press for his educational circular of 22 August 1885 limiting half of Bombay Presidency's free studentships in high schools to the lower *jatis*. [49] In publicly venting the Sarvajanik Sabha's less than disinterested accusations that he was actively promoting *jati* divisions and anti- brahmanism in education, Lee-Warner indicated that his purpose was merely to prevent brahman *jatis* from monopolizing free studentships (such as in the Deccan where 122 of 155 free studentships were held by brahman boys in 1885), and thereby establishing a more equitable distribution of educational resources. [50] In private correspondence, however, Lee-Warner's sympathy for the education of the lower *jatis* was also tempered with a certain raison d'état. He wrote:

> During the past twenty years we have parted with the European props which support the roof [of British rule] . . . We have turned our deputy collectors into native officers, reduced our European inspectors and schoolmasters, and while we have lost all these influential British subordinates, their places in the Dekhan mostly have been filled by brahmans. The remedy is to look to the foundations of our administration and either underpin them with European agency or (as seems to me the best course at present) secure subordinates from the non-brahman classes, the Marathas of the non-sacerdotal castes, the Mahomedans, the Europeans, 'Natives of India' and others . . . If we do not loosen the power in the administration which the Poona brahmans have acquired, we must expect strikes and difficulties. Scholarships should be given to help the backward classes, and we should educate the men we want for the public service . . . [the brahmans] caste and sacerdotal pretensions must make them opposed to British rule conducted on liberal lines of freedom and equality. [51]

The 'liberal' nature of Lee-Warner's initiative in 1885 did, however, find much support among the Satya Shodhak Samaj and missionary establishments. [52] Rev. Smith of the American Marathi Mission in Ahmednagar memorialized the Bombay government on the benefits of such an educational strategy in January 1886, and on his return,

Chatfield, after stemming brahman criticism by abolishing all free studentships in 1888, revived, in part, Lee-Warner's policy in 1892 by reinventing free studentships solely for the 'backward classes'. [53] Lee-Warner's directive was, however, largely of benefit to caste Hindu nonbrahmans, not untouchables. Nonetheless, by the latter part of the 1880s, sections of the Bombay Presidency press were also beginning to advise the Bombay government that it was time to move away from their confused and ambivalent policy on untouchable education as embodied in the Education Commission's directives, and to effect, if not a radical change, at least a clear stance on untouchable education. [54] Suggestions slowly turned to open criticism from newspapers like the *Indian Spectator* in 1890:

> It is very hard on the so-called low castes in India that though in theory they are equally eligible with all classes of Her Majesty's subjects for the benefits conferred by a civilized government, they should be practically debarred from most of these by being treated at school as something less than ordinary schoolboys . . . We have heard brahman friends say that the upper classes would try to meet the requirements of the case. This offer of a compromise compares favourably with the position of government that professes to be guided by principles of equality, but is not. If this sneaking partiality is tolerated long enough, we should not be surprised to hear a High Court Judge declining to do equal justice as between a brahman and a shudra, simply because the former is pleased to look on the latter as low-born. [55]

In spite of increasing criticism, however, the 'sneaking partiality' continued. Indeed, Lee-Warner's advocacy of untouchable educational rights in the late 1880s brought a cautious response from the Bombay government. He wrote: 'As I have reason to believe that the opponents of education and of the equal rights of man are at present active, I further recommend that government call attention to the despatch of Her Majesty's government and direct the collectors of Poona, Satara and Ahmednagar to warn village officers that it is their duty to assist and promote all efforts to educate the people, which are acknowledged by

grants-in-aid from government.' [56] The Governor of Bombay, D.J.M. Reay, was quick to point out to Lee-Warner that he should not go around proclaiming the 'equal rights of man' in India. Lee-Warner suggested that what he had meant was 'the equal rights of all castes to education and protection of the law'. Advocacy and promotion of untouchable educational rights clearly perturbed the Bombay government as much as it troubled local British administrators in western India. T.D. Mackenzie, Secretary to the Governor of Bombay, stated the position at the end of the 1880s in words which showed little change from similar statements by K.M. Chatfield at the beginning of the 1880s: 'Given religious prejudice, it is preferable to await the effects of education, time and the railways to remove prejudices, rather than threaten patels with penalties, if they do not actively promote Mahar education. They should be encouraged to promote the education of all, but to force them into this will only make the business more hateful to them . . . Caste must be reduced further by railways and education before Mr Lee-Warner's suggestions are implemented.' [57]

II

Whereas the ambivalent practice of colonial administrators in the educational development of untouchables in western India generally served in the 1880s to perpetuate the educational dominance of a caste Hindu elite and the continuance of a downward filtration theory of educational development, Scottish Presbyterian and American Marathi missionaries in western India, on the other hand, had adopted a policy of equal rights for all castes and communities in their schools. As the Manmad case in 1884 indicated, missionary pressure from institutions like the Church Mission Society in Nasik was motivated by the missionaries' wish to use their institutions to educate/ convert all castes of Hindus to Christianity and to prevent the colonial government from using them simply as a place to despatch 'troublesome' untouchable students, who, if admitted to government schools, would have emptied them of caste Hindus. [58] Nonetheless, the perceived parallels, between low-caste untouchable *bhakti* beliefs and Protestant Christian doctrines

had also made Protestant missionaries feel that there was particular potential for conversion through education of the lower and untouchable j'atis. [59] By the 1880s, the Church Mission Society was influential in Nasik, the efforts of the Free Church of Scotland were extensive among the untouchable communities of Pune and Bombay, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel was working in Ratnagiri; and American Marathi Mission schools were promoting untouchable instruction in Bombay, Pune, Ahmednagar, and Satara. As the Assistant District Collector of Satara, Fry, commented: 'Low- caste boys have an excellent opportunity for education wherever any of the schools of the American Marathi Mission are found. Among the best in this charge are those . . . in Satara taluka . . . in the Wai taluka . . . and in the Koregaon taluka.' [60] The consequence of such an association between potential untouchable converts and non-conformist Protestant missionaries was not only to render the missionaries a major support for untouchable protest, but also to make them together a strong pressure group in compelling the Bombay government into a slow reappraisal of its attitude to untouchable education in government schools in the late nineteenth century.

Pursuit of the educational rights of untouchable Hindus, and particularly of untouchable Christian converts, had long been laid conspiratorially by both caste Hindus and government administrators at the hands of missionaries from as early as the 1850s. For example, when Jotirao Phule established his first low-caste schools in Pune between 1848 and 1852 and placed them under a managing committee—The Society for the Promotion of the Education of Mahars and Mangs—in 1852, it was emphasized that he was influenced by the activities of the Free Church of Scotland and the American Marathi Missions. [61] Likewise, in July 1850, the government vernacular school in Dhulia, Khandesh district, had refused to admit a Mang Christian convert. The school board stated that if a Christian convert or a Mang or Mahar applied for admission, they would find it difficult to vote for exclusion, but felt the 'expediency on questions of this kind of not bringing on such discussions.' J. Bazett, the Dhulia Court Judge, adjudicated,

however, that there was no educational rule to justify the exclusion. Bazett was known for his missionary sympathies and his connection with the evangelical, David Davidson. [62] In June 1856 another petition was made to the Bombay government by a Christian Mahar convert who had been refused entry to the government school at Dharwar. Missionaries were again seen to be behind the petition. This exclusion occurred in direct contradiction of the Wood Despatch of 1854 which, as a result of increasing missionary pressure over low-caste and untouchable education, had prohibited the exclusion of any student from publicly-funded schools on caste grounds. The Bombay Board of Education stated, however, that 'it would not be right for the sake of a single individual, the only Mahar who has ever yet come forward to beg for admission into a school attended only by pupils of caste, to force him into association with them at the probable risk of making the institution practically useless to the great mass of Indians.' [63] In spite of this opposition, or at best ambivalence, of colonial administrators, some individual instances of untouchables securing educational rights nonetheless began to emerge in the early 1880s as a result of untouchable and missionary pressure on the government. The Educational Inspector, North-East Division, H.P. Jacob issued a circular in 1880 suggesting the schoolmasters admit untouchable students. [64] In response, eight schools in Kolaba district—at Dabhan, Karamsad, Alindra Patel, and Samarkha—were boycotted by caste Hindus. At the girls' school at Nadiad, when two untouchable girls requested admittance, they were immediately 'excused attendance' until further instructions could be obtained from Jacob. The general belief in Nadiad and Dabhan was that a conspiracy was being perpetrated by Presbyterian missionaries who were sending untouchable Christian converts for admission to government schools. Unlike the complete exclusion of the 1860s and 1870s, however, Jacob determined that the untouchable girls in Nadiad should be segregated on the school verandah, and if the caste Hindu students failed to attend notwithstanding this separation, then the latter were to be excluded from other schools. As a result of this policy, most of the schools in Kolaba district reopened by mid-November 1880, with the exception of

the deserted 200-pupil school of Karamsad, where the parents refused to relent in their opposition to the admission of one untouchable boy. In response, Jacob closed the school, transferred the masters and ordered that the absent students were not to be admitted to any other school in the area. [65]

In the central and southern divisions, a similar compromise using the verandah was adopted when, on 6 March 1882, Yeshwantrao Raoji Tolmatti sent a petition to the Education Department on behalf of the high-caste Hindu residents of Dharwar requesting the rescinding of the order admitting two Christian Mahar converts to Dharwar high school. The Director of Public Instruction, Chatfield, replied that if the boys were separated away from the caste Hindu children, there was no reason to expel them, because (as explicitly emphasized in the Education Commission report), unlike primary education where alternatives might be available, they could not receive a secondary education elsewhere. [66] In consequence, the inhabitants of Dharwar (like Manmad) attempted to start a private English school, although without a government grant-in-aid the venture proved difficult to sustain. [67] Likewise in Waduth in Satara district in 1887, the local caste Hindu schoolmaster was reported to the government by Rev. Bruce and fined Rs 3 by the Education Department for denying Mahar Christian converts entry to the school which was located in his own house. [68] The most prominent case, however, in revealing the growing challenge that untouchable education with missionary support was beginning to pose to village social structures was that of the persistent attempts by the villagers*patel,* Bapu Bin Babaji, and the *kulkarni,* Ganesh Bhivarao, to close the American Marathi Mission School in Ranjangao Ganpati (Sirur taluka, Pune district) between 1880 and 1889. [69]

Bapu Bin Babaji was appointed as *patel* of Ranjangao for life in 1859 on an emolument of Rs 89 per annum. [70] There had been no recorded difficulties in Ranjangao until the establishment by Rev. R. Winsor of the American Marathi Mission School in the village in 1879 under the charge of two Indian teachers/catechists, Jesuba Bhagoba and John

Salar. The average attendance in the school in the 1880s 'was about 16 students', most of whom were Mahars (with some Marathas), but the school did not register for a grant-in-aid until 1886. [71] In October 1880, the *patel* of Ranjangao, Bapu Bin Babaji, and the *kulkarni*, Ganesh Bhivarao, forcibly closed down the American Marathi Mission School, and intimidated the Mahar students and Indian missionary teachers. Although Bapu Bin Babaji and Ganesh Bhivarao denied the charges, they were suspended from their offices as a result of a contradictory statement of apology for closing the school provided by their lawyers. After five months they were reinstated by the new Collector of Ahmednagar, Moore, in March 1881. [72] In spite of threats of dismissal, the *patel,* Bapu Bin Babaji, again forcibly closed down the American Marathi Mission School on 12 January 1887 and threatened the property and personal safety of the Mahar families, particularly seven Mahars—Rasu and Sidu Ranu, Dhondiba Dharu, Sakharam Anant, Dhondiba Limbji, Ranu Andoba and Dhondi Rakhmaji—and their two Indian Christian teachers—Jesuba Bhagoba and John Salar. Two Maratha non-brahman families of Bahadur Kasiba and Ganpat Bapuji were also expelled from the school. [73] On complaints from these families and their Indian missionary teachers to Rev. R. Winsor, Winsor wrote to WA. East, Collector of Pune, who despatched P.C.H. Snow, second Assistant Collector of Pune, to conduct an enquiry on 1 February 1887. Snow found a situation of tension which had been simmering in Ranjangao between high-caste Hindus and the untouchable Mahars since the *patels* dismissal and reinstatement in the early 1880s. The *patel* had finally been driven by the Mahars to lose his temper and act, in Snow's words, 'in a most violent, headstrong and foolish manner.' [74] Snow's adjudication, however, placed all the responsibility for events on the Mahars. He felt that missionary influence had led them to affect an independence and self-sufficiency which caused them to be insubordinate in their ordinary village duties. As happened commonly in Ahmednagar, Snow argued, the village officers then retaliated by withdrawing Mahar/Mang village rights, which was sufficient to incite the Mahars and Mangs to violence against them. Although the *patel,* Bapu Bin Babaji, should have complained to

the *mamletdar,* Snow felt that his frustration was comprehensible, especially since Mahars in general, in becoming Christian, seemed to lose all moral restraints. [75] On Snow's advice, the Collector of Poona, WA. East, cautioned the *patel*, ordered the school to be reopened, dismissed Mahar fears of violence as exaggerated, and placed the blame for events squarely on Winsor and his Indian catechists. In particular, he cautioned Winsor and his teachers from interfering further in village affairs between the *patel* and village servants, and exhorted him to exercise control over his congregation. [76] This decision was effectively a blow to missionary authority and, like Manmad in 1884—5, was seen as colonial administrative recognition of the authority of the caste Hindu villagers.

In his letter to D.J.M. Reay, Governor of Bombay, on 20 June 1887, complaining against East's decision, Winsor provided insight into the alternative experience of the Mahar untouchable petitioners in 'Ranjangao'. According to the evidence that Winsor derived from the untouchable families, Bapu Bin Babaji had close connections with the head clerk in the collector's office. [77] This connection had allegedly paved the way for Bapu Bin Babaji's rapid reinstatement as *patel* after five months of suspension in March 1881, when Moore replaced Campbell as Collector of Ahmednagar. [78] In the illegal closure of the mission school on 12 January 1887, Winsor alleged that the clerk had also played a facilitatory role. The *patel* closed the school on 12 January 1887, presumably having been informed that when the Deputy Educational Inspector came to visit the school on 3 Feb-ruary, he would record its closure and sanction the withdrawal of its recently awarded grant-in-aid. [79] The untouchable families alleged that on the night before the Assistant Collector of Poona, PC.H. Snow, took evidence in Ranjangao, Bapu Bin Babaji feasted the clerk, who subsequently distorted the evidence taken by Snow and fabricated false charges against the Mahars in the Collector's office. Moreover, Bapu Bin Babaji was alleged to have received, through the same clerk, a copy of the letter sent by the Collector of Poona, W.A. East to Rev. Winsor on 5 February 1885, which conveyed Snow's sentiments that Winsor was to blame for

events in Ranjangao and that he should desist from interfering in village affairs. The untouchable families alleged that Bapu Bin Babaji then used the letter to intimidate them further by citing his power to prevent them from seeking assistance from the government, and encouraged them to throw out the mission altogether. [80] Snow and East seem to have been misled in their evidence collection and conclusions, although further investigation did not produce any evidence of collusion in their office.

As in the Manmad case, it was the Educational Inspector, Southern Division, W Lee-Warner, who seemed to provide a solution to the problem by pointing out that neither Snow nor East had evidence of or had even mentioned a specific action of disobedience by the Mahars. The problem was essentially that education, such as that of the missionaries in Ranjangao, was creating a realisation among untouchable villagers that, in Lee-Warner's words: 'They can now sell the labour of their hands and are not bound to sit at home and work the customary service . . . without receiving the customary perquisites. . . . The system in force in many villages of compelling Mahars and others to stay at home is a device suggested by a specious pretence of precaution against crime, but is really proposed by the village officers to suppress movement towards the emancipation of labour.' [81] Lee-Warner elicited strong protest from Snow and East for his additional comments that they should remind village officers of their duty to 'promote' every effort to educate all castes of students in schools assisted by the government, local boards or grants-in-aid. Both Snow and East pointed out that they did everything possible to encourage village officers to facilitate untouchable education, but further investigation in Satara and Ahmednagar showed the widespread nature of caste Hindu opposition to missionary schools. Both the Collector of Ahmednagar, G. Waddington, and Collector of Satara, G.F.M. Grant, confirmed that while open opposition by village officers was uncommon, the widespread hindrance by village officers to mission schools like the American Marathi Mission, and to Mahar attendance, was notoriously diffuse. [82] This view seemed to be further substantiated by the activities

of the caste Hindu villagers of Ranjangao after the American Marathi Mission was reopened on 10 February 1887, its grant-in-aid renewed, and the *patel,* Bapu Bin Babaji, dismissed on 31 August 1887. Between 1887 and 1889, the dispute in Ranjangao over the American Marathi Mission School degenerated into open acts of arbitrary violence instigated by the dismissed *patel* against the Mahar families who continued to send their boys to the mission school. Rev. R. Winsor petitioned the government on 26 and 28 August 1889 with urgent requests for the government to intervene to prevent further injury to Mahar families and destruction of their property by caste Hindu villagers, and the Assistant Collector, Cappell, was despatched to quell the violence. [83] By the late 1880s and early 1890s a disregard for caste in missionary schools like those in Ranjangao and Manmad was clearly becoming a cause of considerable concern among caste Hindu villagers, particularly because of the untouchable economic mobility which it was facilitating within rural Hindu society. Nonetheless, while missionary education and strategic support was clearly a factor in the growing protests of the untouchable Hindus and Christian converts in the 1880s and 1890s, the agency behind the protests arose principally, as in Ranjangao, from untouchable Hindus and Christian converts themselves.

III

In the early 1890s the case of the Dapoli municipal primary school in Ratnagiri district revealed that persistent untouchable protest, even with limited Christian missionary support, could challenge the government's ambivalent attitudes on untouchable education in government schools. On 1 July 1892, a group of retired Mahar and Chambhar non-commissioned army officers in Dapoli, led by pensioner Subhedar-Major Ganganak Sanjanak, applied to Dapoli Municipality for the admission of their children to the Dapoli municipal primary school and for the education of their children along with caste Hindu students. [84] These untouchable Mahar and Chambhar officers had been compelled by the British government around 1892 to retire from the Indian Native Army in Pune where previously they and their children

had received education in regimental schools. Their older children, totalling 10 (7 Chambhar and 3 Mahar children), had been admitted to the local missionary high school in Dapoli, but their younger children, totalling 14 (4 Chambhar and 10 Mahar students), were without a primary school after the closure of the local missionary primary school the previous year in 1891. [85] The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, supervised by Rev. Alfred Gadney in Dapoli, had erected a school building in Dapoli in 1879 at a cost of Rs 5000 and the building had been occupied since 1882 as a school and accommodation for orphans and Indian Christian girls. [86] By the mid-1880s the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel had five schools in Dapoli, but their grants-in-aid were threatened by low attendance caused by staff illness and unspecified 'rumours' about the school. [87] By 1891 it is unclear exactly how many of these missionary schools remained open, but the untouchable primary school students who returned to Dapoli from military stations around 1892 found themselves without access to schooling.

In response to the petition from the untouchable parents, the Dapoli municipal council claimed, on 5 August 1892, that the Mahar and Chambhar children could not be admitted to the municipal school since all the caste Hindu boys would thereby have to abandon the school for religious reasons. They agreed, however, that if the Mahar and Chambhar petitioners could collect 20 to 25 untouchable boys, a separate class with a separate teacher would be opened for them. [88] The Mahar and Chambhar officers rejected this proposal of a separate class on the grounds that it would lead to an inferior education for their children by huddling together different standards in one class, not to mention the emphasis that separate education gave to their untouchability. [89] Moreover, as there were only 14 untouchable boys, on 8 September 1892 Subhedar-Major Ganganak Sanjanak, and the Mahar and Chambhar officers, repeated their request that the untouchable boys be admitted to the existing municipal class. [90] The municipality, however, remained opposed on religious grounds and resolved that nothing further could be done to admit Mahar and Chambhar children.

[91] On 21 November 1892, the Mahar officers, therefore, petitioned the Assistant Collector of Ratnagiri, and when nothing was done, they petitioned the Collector of Ratnagiri, W.W Drew, on 1 January 1893. Drew wrote to the municipality asking whether the officers' children could be located on the verandah of the school building and receive instruction there. [92] Forced into action by the Collector, Dapoli municipality decided on 18 January 1893 that the school building was insufficient for the present number of students and that steps should be taken to increase the size of the verandah, place the untouchable boys there, and employ another teacher to instruct them. [93] Lack of funds, however, prevented this decision being implemented immediately. Moreover, the Mahar and Chambhar officers were asked to pay Rs 50 as their share of the price of extending the verandah. [94] The municipality then spent the next thirteen months in preparing a plan for the extension of the school verandah and in getting the approval of the municipal engineer. His approval was still pending almost two years later in November 1894. [95]

When a further address to the Collector of Ratnagiri, *W.W.* Drew, in November 1893 brought no further action on the matter, the Mahar and Chambhar officers took up the matter with J. Nugent, Commissioner of the Southern Division, when he visited Dapoli in February 18 94. [96] Nugent pointed out to the Municipal President, Vishnu Hari Barve, that the school was supported from public funds and should therefore be open to all castes in accordance with government grant-in-aid rules. The municipality, however, again sought to avoid the issue by now deciding to crowd the untouchable students into the original unextended verandah and ordered the schoolmaster to educate them on the verandah according to their academic levels. [97] Although their children were therefore admitted to the school verandah on 19 February 1894, the Mahar and Chambhar officers and parents had good reason to be dissatisfied with this arrangement as the level of the verandah wall obstructed the students' hearing and vision of the classroom, and the verandah was open to sun and rain alike. Moreover, the untouchable boys were thereby separated from their classes and

huddled together on the verandah regardless of their age and attachment. In the final analysis, this municipal compromise of 'sitting untouchable students on the school verandah' was as much a rejection of the parents' wish for the education of their children as denying them entry to the school altogether. [98]

In April 1894, therefore, the group of Mahar and Chambhar army officers organized a joint meeting of the Dapoli Chambhar Mandal, and Mahar-Chambhar Anarya Dosh Pariharak Mandal in the Chambhar quarter of Dapoli, in order to produce concerted action for the admission of their children to the school classroom. [99] One of the most prominent among these retired Mahar and Chambhar officers was a former *haveldar* Mahar officer, Gopal Baba Valangkar. In 1888 he had been retired from the Indian army as a result of the British government's policy of removing untouchable soldiers from its ranks. He returned to Dapoli where, along with other pensioned Mahar and Chambhar officers, he established the Anarya Dosh Pariharak Mandal in 1890. [100] Other leading members of the Mandal included Subhedar Mahadaji Ramachandra Palavankar (secretary), Ramji Pandu Palavankar (a *mukadam),* and Sambhu Krishnaji Devarukkar (a mill clerk). [101] The united demand of the Dapoli Mahar and Chambhar *jatis* that their children be admitted to government school classrooms to receive their education like caste Hindu students was publicized in a letter from Valangkar to the Marathi newspaper *Din Bandhu* on 15 April 1894.

Valangkar himself was syncretic in his social and religious outlook. Influenced by the Kabir*panth,* with a knowledge of Sanskrit literature, Maharashtrian *bhakti* Hinduism, and Protestant Christianity, he found common ground with Christian missionaries like Gadney, both in general religious attitudes to caste Hindu orthodoxy and with regard to untouchable rights to education. [102] However, although missionary connections were important in supporting the educational claims of Dapoli Mahars and Chambhars, the rationale for their actions in Dapoli came from their knowledge of the views on education of the non-

brahman reformist Jotirao Phule. [103] Valangkar himself was a colleague of Phule in the Satya Shodhak Samaj. He spoke along with Phule at Satya Shodhak Samaj meetings, such as that in honour of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad in 1885, and Phule and Valangkar are reputed to have tested caste Hindu convictions on untouchability by seating visitors to the Samaj in the same eating row as Valangkar. [104]

Jotirao Phule's views on low-caste and untouchable education in western India are portrayed graphically in his short Marathi ballad 'Brahman Teachers in the Educational Department'. Phule's ballad represents with perfect exactitude the events and sentiments which were still being played out in Dapoli in the 1890s, over twenty years after it was written. The local brahmans in Phule's ballad use their social status and educational position in the village to prevent low-caste and untouchable children attending school, while convincing colonial administrators either that they are attending or that they have no wish to be educated. Phule describes the brahman teachers' methods of preventing low-caste and untouchable attendance:

> If children of their own caste make mistakes,
> They repeat and explain, and give punishments wisely.
> If other children make mistakes, they strike them with their fists.
> They twist their ears sharply, and when no one is watching,
> They beat the shudra children and make them run away [105]

Brahman schoolmasters and school inspectors also collaborate to mislead colonial officials about low-caste and untouchable education and to maintain brahman privileged educational and administrative status:

> The master tells of their [untouchable/low-caste] qualities.
> He describes them angrily. He greatly exaggerates the report.
> I will tell you a little of it: 'The caste of shudras have got no sense,
> They have no desire for education at all.'
> This is not true. The brahmans are impostors.
> They achieve their ends and promote the position of their own

caste.

No one brings them to justice. [106]

Valangkar, in his Marathi letters to *Din Bandhu* on behalf of the Anarya Dosh Pariharak Mandal, described the Dapoli school entry protest in 1893—4 in a similar way. He saw the opposition to untouchable school entry as a *tamasha* or street theatre by brahman actors under the guise of religious reasoning for the sake of their social dominance. Valangkar pointed out that caste Hindus expressed themselves in public to be in favour of untouchable educational development, and he claimed that publicly 'people shout in favour of unity, but in private they spit at this unity'. [107] Such deception, in Valangkar's opinion, had to be exposed by the mobilization of untouchables to petition the government for their right to enter government schools, such as in Dapoli. [108] The untouchable military pensioners of the Chambhar Mandal and Anarya Dosh Pariharak Mandal, therefore, set about putting Phule's challenge into practice as a result of the direction provided by their own army education, Phule's social teachings, missionary support, and a trusting belief in British policy declarations that 'the doors of learning have been thrown wide open and anyone of any religion or jati may enter.' [109]

The aim of the untouchable military pensioners in Dapoli in entering government schools was, however, for them only a means to the greater end of furthering untouchable social consciousness and development. In another letter to *Din Bandhu,* Valangkar encouraged Mahars and Chambhars to organize their protest activities on 'knowledge based on reading' and 'bhakti devotion fixed on God'. [110] In Valangkar's opinion, education was an instrument with which to develop the established socio-religious questioning inherent in untouchable *bhakti* devotionalism into a widening process of selfexamination and awareness of exploitation within Hindu society. Brahmans had misused their monopoly of literacy and learning to misinterpret Sanskrit scriptures in their own social interests, and to ensure untouchable servitude by denying them the educational means to challenge brahmanic control. [111] The acquisition of literacy and education,

therefore, would allow untouchable Mahars and Chambhars to challenge this subjection by developing the critiques of their oppression already inherent in their own culture, thereby allowing them to generate a new social consciousness. As Valangkar explained this perspective.

> From education has come the ability for people of all religions and jatis to think about their religion. The people of every jati have established mandals in their jatis and examined their customs as a result of insight gained into the obstacles which created sorrow for human kind in the old religion. By quickly abandoning these customs, these people have determined to behave according to a religion based on truth and have begun work for the regeneration of their jatis. Thus we should acquire education for people in our jatis in the backward classes who have come to such a lowly condition, and the full strength will come to us to question a religion which does not allow us any humanity and considers us lower than beasts. [112]

Low-caste educational improvement was, however, in Phule's and Valangkar's opinions, hindered by the colonial theory of downward filtration of education, which had helped to perpetuate a high-caste Hindu educational and administrative monopoly. Drawing on his European reading, Phule proposed: 'We have never heard of a philosophy more benevolent and more Utopian. It is proposed by men, who witness the wondrous changes brought about in the western world, purely by the agency of popular knowledge, to redress the defects of the two hundred millions of India, by giving superior education to the superior classes and to them only . . . Upon what grounds is it asserted that the best way to advance the moral and intellectual welfare of the people is to raise the standard of instruction among the higher classes? A glorious argument this for aristocracy, were it only tenable?' [113] The effect of such a policy, according to Phule, educated the brahmans and higher castes to a level which gave them a virtual monopoly of state education and administrative employment. [114] By contrast it was very difficult to find a single educated person among the Mahar, Mang and

Chambhar *jatis*, whom the educational system left 'wallowing in ignorance and poverty'. [115] Valangkar and other writers in *Din Bandhu,* likewise, stressed the wide inequalities created by government emphasis on high-caste education. [116] Valangkar indicated that untouchable Mahars, Chambhars, and Mangs had struggled to secure even the 'scrapings' of an education, while its 'cream' had been bestowed on the higher castes. In spite of Queen Victoria's proclamation in 1858 to allocate government employment on the basis of ability and not caste or creed, even jobs suitable to these educational 'scrapings' (such as the lower jobs in the military, police, railway or postal service) were refused to untouchables. In consequence, untouchable people were forced into exploitative menial employment in villages because of their lack of education. [117] The Educational Commissioner, W Lee-Warner's perception of the educational struggle in Ranjangao between 1881 and 1889 as being one of securing or preventing the social consciousness and educational means to employment mobility for untouchable villagers finds strong confirmation in the untouchable perspective of activists like Valangkar. What is more, untouchables, like those in Dapoli, perceived their failure to advance both educationally and occupationally not simply as a result of caste discrimination, but also as a consequence of ambivalent government support for untouchable education.

Although the Chambhar and Anarya Dosh Pariharak Mandals petitioned the government and publicized their protest in the Marathi press, orthodox caste Hindu objection on the Dapoli municipal board, was, however, so strong that the board persisted in its policy of using the verandah for the Mahar and Chambhar students in the hope that the Commissioner of the Southern Division, Nugent, would acquiesce in the matter, 'as government in the past had rarely forced such an issue to its implementation.' [118] Their orthodox caste Hindu perspectives prohibited literacy and education to untouchables. Exegesis of the origins of Hindu social structure (like the *purusha sukta* of the *Rig Veda)* bestowed by divine decree the prerogatives of learning, literacy, and godliness on brahmans alone, who as the foremost varna were said

to have sprung from the head of the *purusha sukta* or primordial man. [119] By virtue of their literacy, the brahman *jatis* saw themselves as interpreters of the Hindu sacred texts and believed that their learning was necessary to give the texts moral and religious form in daily life and practice. Moreover, their predominance in the colonial state's educational and administrative structures was perceived as a part of this brahmanic prerogative. By contrast, the low-caste shudras and untouchables who were said to have sprung from the feet of the *purusha sukta*, were excluded from literacy, learning and godliness, and designated the degrading menial occupations of Hindu society. According to this orthodox perspective held by the President, Barve, and the Dapoli municipality, untouchables who aspired to education were trying to step out of their prescribed occupational roles and usurp high-caste Hindu social rights in social and government institutions. The attempts of the untouchables in Dapoli to enter Dapoli primary school, the violence against an untouchable school in Ranjangao, or the secession from the missionary school in Manmad were not merely questions of a right to an education, but more fundamental manifestations of an emergent social conflict in western India over social authority with its basis in the changing occupational rights and economic mobility which education would bring.

In June 1894, Nugent finally lost patience with Barve and the Dapoli municipality, not to mention the Collector of Ratnagiri, Drew, whose ambivalence over the implementation of Mahar educational rights Nugent found negligent. He recommended to Lee-Warner, Secretary to Government, that the Dapoli primary school grant be withdrawn. [120] Barve retorted in his own defence that untouchable inclusion in the municipal school had to be acquired by degrees because of the numerical preponderance of high-caste Hindu boys and the danger of secession of all high-caste students from the school as a result of the orthodox religious scruples of their parents. He argued that, first, the students should be introduced on to the verandah, and later to the different standards, a practice which, he claimed, had previously been adopted in Rev. Gadney's missionary school in Dapoli. [121] It was

pointed out that elsewhere in Ratnagiri and the Konkan, as in the nearby school of Mandagad, untouchable boys were taught on the verandah. Only due to the high untouchable population were there separate schools for untouchable children at Malvan, Pen, and Panvel. [122] Having been criticized by Nugent for negligence, the Collector of Ratnagiri, Drew, for his part supported the Dapoli Municipal President, Barve. Drew believed that Barve had effectively ignored government orders, but at the same time had done all that was politic under the circumstances. The question, he suggested, was not whether untouchable boys should enter the school, but whether the verandah was a suitable arrangement in the light of no other solution being feasible. [123] When Barve was finally ordered by the Director of Public Instruction, K.M. Chatfield, to accept the officers' petition and include the untouchable boys in the main classes, although separated from the other students by a few feet, the main cause of the problem was put down to the obstruction of the caste Hindu members of the Dapoli municipality and the inaction of the Collector of Ratnagiri, Drew.

Chatfield acted more decisively in favour of untouchable student rights in Dapoli in 1894—where there was no alternative schooling available for untouchable students—than in Manmad in 1884—5 where separation of untouchable and caste Hindu students into separate schools was a viable possibility. Chatfield was, however, undoubtedly aware that Drew's acquiescence in the use of the school verandah for untouchable students was a commonplace compromise by colonial officials where implementation of untouchable educational rights was unavoidable in the 1880s and 1890s. Indeed, where untouchable students did secure any education in government and local board schools, 'sitting on the school verandah' remained the general practical 'compromise' at the local village level. Most district officers seem to have adopted this solution and Drew was not exceptional in feeling it to be a suitable arrangement given the alternative of caste Hindu boycott of most schools which admitted untouchable students into the classroom itself. The Assistant Collector of Satara district, Fawcett, wrote in 1893:

> It is a matter of regret that so few boys of the lower castes attend these schools and little improvement can, I think, be hoped for until some separate accommodation is provided for them so that they may not be obliged to shiver outside in the cold and rain during the monsoon as at present . . . Until, however, each school house contains a verandah or some sort of accommodation for low castes I fear education will not spread amongst them as quickly as can be desired. Where there is plenty of room in the building, there is no difficulty, but it is obvious that there are almost insuperable difficulties in the way of a Mahar or Mang boy taking his place in a school which is so crowded that the boys sit almost touching one another. [124]

Likewise, the Assistant Collector of Surat district, Weir, indicated in 1892: 'The Dhed and Bhangi and Chamar children are almost entirely neglected in the matter of education: large sums are yearly spent on providing schools and education practically for well-born classes . . . Nominally they [untouchable students] of course can attend the schools free, but if they do come to school, they are kept outside wet or shine. They are dirty and objectionable looking and they therefore receive transitory snatches of attention from the master who is probably a brahman and who is busy with a cleaner and pleasanter set of well-born boys inside.' [125]

Lee-Warner's decision in the Dapoli case challenged 'sitting untouchable students on school verandahs' as a valid interpretation in practice of ambivalent Education Commission authorisation of untouchable education. In the following years, when untouchable groups (often with missionary backing) were vocal enough to insist on their rights to enter the schoolroom, steps were subsequently taken to ensure these rights under Lee-Warner's directive. Thus, in March 1895 in Khed, Ratnagiri district, the Collector, Drew, faced an exact repetition of the Dapoli case a year earlier, but now showed considerably more circumspection for government policy. When the vernacular school in Khed received its annual inspection, it was found that the untouchable class was located on the verandah, with 7 of the 14

enrolled boys in attendance. Drew, therefore, requested Nugent to authorise the same arrangement as in Dapoli, using the classroom, but with separate seating for the untouchable students. When this policy was implemented, however, what Drew had predicted in Dapoli immediately occurred in Khed. The caste Hindu parents withdrew their children, leaving a few Mahar and Muslim students out of a school register of 180 pupils. The caste Hindu parents in Khed sent petitions to Drew requesting a return to the old system of separation on the verandah. When it proved impossible to solve the problem by recruiting enough untouchable children to form a separate untouchable class, B.R. Sahasrabuddhe, Educational Inspector, Southern Division, was left to negotiate the Dapoli compromise of untouchable students seated at a distance of a few feet in their respective classrooms. [126]

Likewise, at Uran, Kolaba district, in October 1895, the school committee of the local municipality ordered that Mahar and Mang boys should be taught with other boys in the local Marathi school, but separated by a few feet. [127] In Alindra, Matar taluka, Kolaba district, on 18 September 1900, a local missionary 'forcibly thrust' 18 untouchable students into a local government school of 80 caste Hindu students. The local inhabitants led by Dabhai Nathabhai sent a series of petitions, including one to the Commissioner, Northern Division, on 23 September, and another with 49 signatories to the Governor of Bombay on 9 December 1902. In the petition they indi-cated that the caste Hindu students had been forced to abandon the school because of the 18 untouchable students, and requested that the untouchable pupils be excluded and a separate school provided for them. The disingenuous reply of the Director of Public Instruction in April 1903 was that, as there were now only 18 pupils in the school, a new school was unnecessary, but if 60 caste Hindu boys returned to the school on the terms of the Dapoli compromise, the local missionaries, who had allegedly initiated the incident, might be asked to establish a separate school for the 18 untouchable students with a grant-in-aid from government. [128]

It is doubtful, however, that government strategy succeeded in overcoming, to any substantial degree, untouchable segregation on verandahs or the exclusion of untouchable students. Like the de facto division of schools which was authorized in Manmad in 1884, in Alindra the long-term solution was to separate the untouchable students into missionary schools. Even in Dapoli, where subsequent verification of the admission of untouchable children in 1895 suggested compliance with the government ruling, it was revealed in a further petition from Ramnak Chownak, President of the Dapoli Anarya Dosh Pariharak Mandal in 1901, that untouchable exclusion from primary education in Dapoli had, in practice, remained unchanged. [129] In spite of Lee-Warner's attempts in the 1890s, untouchable education in Bombay Presidency between 1880 and at least 1900 was, at best, a compromise which managed untouchable education and accommodated or allowed it to be determined by the interests of the caste Hindu social order. The Bombay government did not consistently promote 'a slow but persistent attack' on the social and religious prejudices of untouchability, but, on the contrary, the general ambivalence of most colonial administrators in practice continued to allow a largely caste Hindu perception of education and social construction to dominate in late-nineteenth-century western India. The agency for the promotion of untouchable education was not by and large the British colonial administration (although there were some notable sympathizers like Lee-Warner), but the untouchable communities themselves, often with the support of missionary contacts and resources.

Many accounts of educational development in late-nineteenth-century India attribute the initiative behind educational change and social transformation directly or indirectly to colonial administrative governance. Thus, Nurullah and Naik, writing at the time of Indian independence, conceptualized the colonial government (with some assistance from missionary endeavours) as the driving force behind Indian educational change and modernisation. [130] Bruce McCully, writing a few years earlier in the 1940s, sought to link this educational development to the growth of Indian nationalism in a historical

trajectory which stressed colonial education of Indians in the liberal doctrines of Western thought as the motive force behind the development of the Indian nation-state. [131] McCully's thematic was also developed by others. Anil Seal, in the early 1970s, stressed government education of high-caste elites in Presidency towns as a major cause of the emergence of Indian nationalism, and David Kopf, in his examination of the 'Bengal renaissance' of the early nineteenth century, envisaged British government promotion of Oriental studies as an early impetus in enabling Indians to know their own culture and recognize the potential for national development in indigenous Indian terms. [132] In these works the emphasis falls primarily on the agency of the colonial administration as the instrument or initiator of modernization and national development through the means of its educational institutions.

In more recent years such a linkage of education and modernization under colonial rule has, however, increasingly come under criticism, first in the work of B.H. Gumperz and Ellen McDonald, and later in that of Gauri Viswanathan. [133] In adopting David Newsome's analysis of Victorian education to India, Gumperz and McDonald have both argued that education in India was the inculcation of a code of moral values which linked 'godliness and good learning' in a process of self-improvement and character-building as a means towards the individual's development of intellectual truth and moral perfection. This Arnoldian educational theory of the Victorian period was applied to Bombay Presidency by its Director of Education, K.M. Chatfield, between 1874 and 1897 with a singular emphasis on 'moral character-building' of Indian elites for administrative employment, rather than (as Newsome has indicated of Victorian Britain) the development of moral character and intellect for the purposes of political leadership. McDonald points out, thereby, that the result of colonial government education was to create Western-educated elites whose perception of social development was limited to individual moral improvement, rather than to spur structural socio-political change, until at least the 1920s. Developing Gumperz's and McDonald's insights, Viswanathan

has sought to question the unalloyed belief of Nurullah and Naik in the colonial 'modernizing mission' through education, and to challenge the arguments of McCully that Britain knowingly put the educational tools of the Enlightenment into the hands of its Indian subjects. Rather, she has argued that the humanistic ideals of the Enlightenment acted as a 'mask of conquest' to strengthen colonial cultural hegemony in India. She sees English education, particularly English literature, as an instrument of social control aiming to fortify colonial vulnerability in a foreign context where direct inculcation of Western (Christian) values via the Bible (instead of Western moral values via more secular literature) might have led to Hindu and Muslim religious protest. English literature thus became an indirect purveyor of Christian moral principles and Western knowledge, as a means of both training the Indian mind under the control of its platonic British guardians and shaping Indian development to colonial purpose. Colonial education was intended primarily as a process of social control rather than of social liberation.

However, a fundamental difficulty with all these accounts (whether they represent colonial education as liberating or repressive) is their primary focus on the discourse of colonial policy statements (Bentinck Minute 1835, Wood Despatch 1854, and Education Commission 1882) and concomitantly their emphasis on the colonial government as either the main driving force behind modernization (as suggested by Nurullah and Naik), the enlightened but unintentional instigator of nationalism (as proposed by McCully), or conversely as the hegemonic instrument of social control (as argued by Viswanathan). In such an emphasis on the power of colonial government 'policy', there is a strong tendency to see the actualities of educational practice in the localities solely as responses to government directive, rather than as interactive determinants which substantially conditioned and even dictated government educational policy. Moreover, such accounts largely neglect the fact that it was not just in the elite colleges close to the centre of colonial administration (which McDonald, Gumperz, and Viswanathan analyse), but also, more importantly, in villages and towns like Manmad that Indian educational development was determined. The growing

number of cases of local untouchable educational protest in the early 1880s would suggest that the 1882 Education Commission's concession of low-caste education on demand within the continuing framework of a 'downward filtration' strategy of education was less a strong administrative 'policy' directive from above than the necessary recognition of a pragmatic trend that was already becoming established in the localities. In ratifying this pragmatic trend of ambivalent compromise, the Education Commission in 1882 fuelled, in turn, a further extension of ambivalent solutions (like sitting untouchable students on school verandahs) as a result of its indecisive temporising between the policy of Arnoldian educationalists (like Chatfield) largely favouring elitist 'downward educational filtration' strategies, and those (like Lee-Warner) in favour of more general extension of education for the purposes of wider participation and concomitant socio-political control. The Manmad case in the 1880s over the downward filtration of English education to untouchables clearly suggests that both the classic characterizations of a stronghanded colonial administration, which either succeeded (as Nurullah and Naik argue) in making 'a slow but persistent attack on social and religious prejudice', or conversely (as Viswanathan argues) in exercising hegemonic social control over Indian society through English education, need much qualification in the 1880s and 1890s in western India. Rather than purposive modernization or hegemonic control, there was ambivalence, indecisive practice/policy, and inconclusive debate at the heart of colonial government with regard to the implementation of low-caste education in late-nineteenth- century western India. It was this temporizing that allowed further consolidation of a conservative and high-caste Hindu-dominated educational structure for Maharashtrian society, leading to aggravated caste conflict well into the twentieth century.

Other accounts of the promotion of educational and social transformation in nineteenth-century India have emphasized the role of Christian missionary societies. It was particularly the work of Geoffrey Oddie, Robert Frykenberg, and Duncan Forrester which revised the view of Christian missionaries in India simply as agent of imperial enterprise. [134] Oddie's early work provided a broader socio-economic

narrative of missionary endeavours in which he charted the changing nature of missionary attitudes, from outright hostility to Hindu society in the early nineteenth century to a more discriminating opposition to caste as a malaise of Hindu society by the late nineteenth century. Forrester, too, examined the emergence of a 'Protestant missionary consensus' against caste by the mid-nineteenth century and the development of missionary education as the main instrument of this attack. He examined missionary activities from their early beginnings with preference for elite instruction and downward filtration of education, and charted their change to mass conversion of low-caste Hindus and untouchables in the 1860s and 1870s. Like Oddie, he located this mass conversion in the socio-economic context of weakening *jajmani* relations in a search by low-caste labourers for new patrons and occupations, and in famines like the Telugu Famine of 1877—8. [135] Mass conversion was an expression of a widening social consciousness that was stimulated by social dislocation and missionary education, and the consequent occupational change among lower castes. It manifested itself in Christian religious form because of obstacles to social mobility within the caste system, a lack of resources among lower castes to establish 'horizontal' movement for social reform, and a search for a new egalitarian social framework and identity. [136] Thereby, in changing socio-economic times, missionary educational attacks on caste not only stimulated untouchable social uplift, but also gradually gave missionaries growing influence over state educational development in colonial India. As Frykenberg has shown of Madras under Tweeddale's governorship in the 1840s, missionary institutions by the mid-nineteenth century had come to possess extensive influence on the government regarding the spread of education in lower-caste Hindu society, the widespread effects of which clearly challenged a downward filtration policy of educational development. [137]

The works of Robin Jeffrey, J.W. Gladstone, Dick Kooiman, and Koji Kawashima on Travancore have sought to expand and qualify further Forrester's, Frykenberg's and Oddie's interrelation of missionary

education, intellectual opposition to caste, and socioeconomic conditions for change by examining how these factors operated and changed over a substantial period in the socio-political interstice of a Hindu princely state. All these above texts reveal how missionary educational initiative in the mid-nineteenth century gave impetus to low-caste Ezhava, Pulaya, and Paraya development from inherited to achieved status, and from dependent subordination to religious reappraisal, new socio-political consciousness, and Christian conversion. Like the economic improvement of parallel communities, such as the low-caste Nadars in Tamil Nadu whom Robert Hardgraves has described as becoming medium-sized traders as a result of the opportunities opened by missionary education after 1840, the Church Missionary Society's promotion of low-caste education in Travancore gave communities such as the Ezhavas the opportunity to develop trade in coconut, palm, and toddy products in the more liberal economy after the 1860s. [138] Likewise, London Missionary Society education allowed low-caste Nadars/Shanars and untouchable Parayas to secure employment as clerks and *kanganies* (labour supervisors) in the coffee plantations of Ceylon (1830—70) and Travancore (after 1870). [139] This economic improvement, in turn, led to missionary-initiated challenges to social restrictions such as the relaxation of dress restrictions on low-caste women after the breast-cloth protests in the 1850s, the formal abolition of Pulaya and Paraya slavery (1855), the legal removal of forced labour (1860), and a legal end to distance pollution on untouchables in public buildings and on roads (1870). [140] In the context of this special emancipation, stimulated by missionary education and the commercializing economy of Travancore after 1860, Jeffrey has argued that 'militant missionary' educational endeavours were the direct driving force behind low-caste and untouchable improvement and an indirect impetus, thereby, for the modernization of Travancore's social and governmental structures under the guidance of the *dewan,* Madhava Rao. [141] Gladstone also corroborates this view of the 'militant missionary'. He argues that it was the social radicalism of missionary ideals and practice which led low-caste communities to a new spiritual and temporal emancipation either in Christian terms; or

alternatively in Hindu terms such as the Shri Narayana Guru movement of the Ezhavas, and the Pulaya movement of Ayyan Kali. In spite of caste factionalism by which nineteenth-century missionary churches were riven, the ideals of the Christian gospel and their inculcation through missionary education provided spiritual renewal and material emancipation for Christian converts and low-caste Hindus. [142] In sum it is argued that it was Protestant Christian missionaries, rather than government, who were the primary agents of low-caste and untouchable educational development and social change.

In more recent years there has, however, been important qualification of the alleged militancy of this missionary role. Kawashima, for example, has indicated of the missionaries in Travancore that, as the Madras government's authorities moved from a policy of a 'civilizing' and 'modernizing' mission in Travancore in the 1860s and 1870s to non-interference by the 1890s, Travancore became more socially conservative, forcing missionaries into greater co-operation and deference to state authorities in the absence of support from the colonial government in Madras. While missionary educational and medical institutions were important to the Travancore government and could not be jeopardized, Travancore state tried to limit the conversional implications of these institutions. The socio-economic effects of missionary education in betterment of low-caste and untouchable communities and the growing reality of Christian conversion among Nadars, Pulayas, and Parayas (of the threat of conversion among Ezhavas) led the Hindu Travancore government (with its roots in high-caste brahman and caste Hindu Nair landowning interests) to initiate pressures to curb missionary educational influence in the 1880s (such as restrictions on grants-in-aid for missionary schools, state curriculum control, inspection of teachers and prohibition of religious instruction). [143] Moreover, missionaries were increasingly expected to exact obedience from and control their low-caste converts within the framework of an essentially conservative state social hierarchy. [144] As Kooiman also stresses, the London Missionary Society's inculcation of Christian codes of moral obedience, missionary

respect for civil authorities, and the distancing of converts caused by a missionary sense of racial paternalism led both plantation owners and landlords by the 1890s to come to see missionaries as a means of social control over their Christian labourers, rather than simply as agents provocateurs. [145]

Such suggestions that missionary militancy was more limited in practice than hitherto believed are also reflected to some degree in western India in the 1880s in cases like that of Manmad and Ranjangao. Just as the Madras government's 'non-interference' in Travancore in the 1880s and 1890s led to increasing social conservatism and limitations on missionary activities, so the Bombay government's alleged claims of 'religious neutrality' in the 1880s in Manmad favoured conservative caste Hindu interests and created ambivalence over untouchable educational development which impacted adversely on missionary educational activities. Rev. Mainwaring and Squire held tenaciously for untouchable and Church Missionary Society educational rights in Manmad, but in practice they were ultimately driven to compromise (in ways not dissimilar to Kawashima's study of Travancore) with the force of wider societal objections to their activities, with state administrative conservatism in the form of the 'downward educational filtration theory', and even with the bitter pill of government sanction of caste Hindu conscientious objection to Christian religious tuition. Moreover, as in Kawashima's and Kooiman's descriptions of the Travancore government in the 1880s and 1890s, there was an expectation on the part of the Bombay government that the missionaries in their Presidency would ensure suitable conduct of their congregations so as not to undermine rural social and occupational structures. Rev. Winsor of the American Marathi Mission in Ranjangao was strongly reprimanded for his lack of control over his catechists and Christian converts, in spite of government recognition of the culpability of the *patel,* Bapu Bin Babaji. Missionary education was doubtlessly an element in untouchable economic change and social mobility, but it was not simply a militant emancipatory force which operated without limitations or beyond the restraints of government and Indian society more generally.

In her study of the interrelationship of Muslim, Hindu, and Christian patterns of belief in south India, Susan Bayly has sought to de-centre even further the role of (Roman Catholic) missionaries as the main agents in the development of Indian Christian identity. In particular, she gives emphasis to the manner in which Indians adapted the doctrines ofWestern Christianity to their own purposes, how they 'captured' the authority of missionaries to enhance indigenous forms of social and political organization, and how they created strategies of resistance by which to incorporate and dominate the impact of colonial (missionary) forms. In emphasizing this incorporation, rather than the transcendence of colonial forms (like Christianity), Bayly argues for a syncretic process of mixing, borrowing, and overlap of religious forms which exhibited not the diffusion of egalitarian ideologies attributed to missionaries by the interpretations of Forrester, Oddie, and others, but the continuity and predominance of an evolving indigenous social order and Indian social agents, whose Christian beliefs continued to reflect perceptions of caste, rank, honours, and ceremonial status shared throughout wider south Indian society. Christian identification was therefore not a product of social egalitarianism, but an assertion of a 'Christian' caste identity as a means of pursuing indigenous conflicts over 'rank' and 'honours'. As Bayly expresses it: 'no one involved in [these] conflicts . . . had any intention of liberating himself from the supposed constraints and disabilities of the Hindu caste system. In these conflicts religious conversion was simply one more means by which a group could seek to gain new honours within an established and increasingly stratified scheme of rank and precedence.' [146]

Although Kooiman differs in degree from Bayly in seeing the missionary role as 'limited' rather than (as Bayly) largely 'determined' by the Indian context, he too conceptualizes missionary education as a force for low-caste social change in terms of Indian forms of social mobility, rather than in terms of more radical non-indigenous agendas for structural social change. He argues that the enhanced economic benefits, which missionary education brought to some low castes like the Ezhavas, often led to attempts to Sanskritize their customs and beliefs in order to rise in the Hindu caste hierarchy. Other lower castes

like Pulayas and Parayas, whose social improvement within Hinduism was impeded by higher-caste Nairs or even Ezhavas, turned, as a result of missionary education, to Christianity as an alternative means of socio-economic mobility. Missionary education thereby activated parallel processes of social development by Sanskritization and Christianization in different low-caste/untouchable communities, but both these processes led to adaptation to the customs and rituals of Great Traditions with the aim of social mobility and advancement, rather than to radical egalitarian challenges for structural social change. Likewise, Henriette Bugge has sought to elaborate the contextual determination of missionaries by rural economic structures in her study of the Protestant Danish Mission and Roman Catholic Missions Etrangeres de Paris in South Arcot, Tamil Nadu, in the late nineteenth century. [147] She argues that there is no clear suggestion that untouchable labourers became Christian because they wanted missionaries to emancipate them from the caste system, or that they converted from an awareness of the social justice of Western liberal ideals, or even that they were seeking greater social mobility within Christianity as compared to Hinduism. Rather, mass conversion in the late nineteenth century was encouraged by a period of economic change in patterns of rural domination enabling untouchable labourers to change old (Hindu land-owning) masters for new (Christian missionary) masters for better material treatment and benefits (such as education) which the latter might bring. Conversion was thereby more a means of establishing new economic bonds of dependency and allegiance than the egalitarian religious movements under missionary direction which Forrester, Oddie, or Jeffrey have described. Christianization might be better described as an indigenous movement, paralleling Sanskritization among low-caste groups within the Hindu caste hierarchy. Thus, it is argued that missionary activities were not only 'limited' (as Kawashima and to some extent Kooiman suggest), but (according to Bayly and Bugge) were actually 'subsumed' into and 'determined' by the indigenous ritual arid social perceptions of their congregations and this wider Indian society in which they were imbricated.

It is apparent in western India (as Bayly and Bugge suggest of south India) that missionary activities were not only 'limited' by the wider society, but 'determined' to a large degree by the indigenous socio-cultural practices of the Indian groups which they sought to convert. On the one hand, certain of these syncretic Christian-Hindu groups may be described as utilizing missionary education and Christianization (in place of Sanskritization) with the aim of social mobility within the caste structure, but on the other hand there were also simultaneously other syncretic Hindu-Christian groups (like the Dapoli Anarya Dosh Pariharak Mandal) which sought to use missionary education and syncretize Christian missionary values with their increasingly radicalized untouchable culture in the pursuit of a more extreme ideological attack on the caste structure itself and on the untouchability that it authorized. Drawing on Christian missionary support in terms of material patronage (often given with the aim of conversion) and often with a misplaced faith in the assistance of colonial officials, local untouchable organizations like the Anarya Dosh Pariharak Mandal led the drive for education and school entry protest on the basis of an indigenous but radical ideology that was formed by the syncretic incorporation into untouchable *bhakti* culture of missionary socio-religious ideals and selected ideas from the low-caste Hindu radical Jotirao Phule and the Satya Shodhak Samaj. [148] In particular, the activities of Phule and the Satya Shodhak Samaj before 1890 helped groups like the Anarya Dosh Pariharak Mandal to sharpen their critical understanding of what Valangkar perceived to be a socio-religious *tamasha* orchestrated by higher-caste Hindus with the aim of securing high-caste dominance over Hindu society. Likewise, in their syncretic incorporation and re-moulding of Arnoldian educational concepts within untouchable culture, education was seen as a means of further developing the introspection and self-questioning already inherent in indigenous, untouchable *bhakti* Hindu culture for the generation of a heightened self-awareness among untouchables of their exploitation in Hindu society, and for the pursuit of their opportunities for social and economic development. Education was a means, as Valangkar explained, not only to greater individual 'godliness and good

learning' (as McDonald and Gumperz argue was characteristic of caste Hindu elites), but also to wider social awareness, economic improvement, and occupational mobility, all of which allowed untouchables to challenge their caste exploitation in structural terms. Bayly and Bugge, however, seem to neglect this syncretic incorporation of colonial-missionary values and practices by radicalizing untouchable cultures, and, thereby, marginalize the dynamism created in Indian society by radical untouchable ideologies for structural social transformation.

In the final analysis, it was not therefore the ambivalent educational policy of a colonial administration, or the often supportive but socially imbricated activities of Christian missionaries, but a radical indigenous ideology/practice of untouchable educational protest that provided the agency and dynamic for untouchable educational development and cultural identity re-formation in late-nineteenth- century western India. Moreover, just as socio-religious syncretism provided the dynamism of change in the less bounded socio-religious communities of pre-colonial India, so continuation of this syncretic identity under British colonialism among those perceived to be at the social margins, like untouchables, provided a dynamic not just for socio-economic mobility within existing social structures, but also for wider social challenge to the increasingly bounded community structures of late-nineteenth-century western India. It was the practical expression of this untouchable syncretism in educational endeavour (as in untouchable religious and military protest) which provided one of the most radical impulses for social change in late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century western India. [149] The question of 'sitting on the school verandah' was not merely one of access across educational and occupational thresholds to better social ranking, but was in many cases —like that of the Anarya Dosh Pariharak Mandal—a syncretically dynamic and ideologically, driven indigenous protest against the caste structure itself and the untouchable discrimination it perpetuated.

9

Anthropological Knowledge and Statistical Frame

Caste in the Census in Colonial India*

Padmanabh Samarendra

Census operations, and various ethnographic surveys of the population conducted by the colonial state in India in the second half of the nineteenth century, generated an influential corpus of knowledge about caste. In this corpus some scholars have detected, while others have denied, a process whereby caste was transformed, the complicity of the state and Western academic disciplines in bringing about this transformation, and the imposition of new ideas on the colonized. At the risk of simplification, I will divide scholarly opinions on the subject into two broad groups. Colonialism, the first set of scholars believes, was made possible as much by 'cultural technologies of rule' (Dirks 2002: 9; also Cohn 1996) as by political and economic domination. In the body of colonial knowledge which was configured particularly from the second half of the nineteenth century by Western academic disciplines (Dirks 2002: 43—4), the colonized were represented as being different from and inferior to the colonizer (Inden 1986: 402—3). These representations, which were subsequently

imbibed by Indians (Metcalf 1995: 114, 233), contributed to the legitimization of colonial domination. These views are contested by scholars who argue that the colonial state was not singularly hell-bent on the question of 'how to "know" and subjugate' (Bayly 1995: 214) its subjects. This group says that, rather than being marginal to the process, Indians and their traditions always combined, howsoever asymmetrically, with their Western counterparts to produce colonial knowledge (Bayly 2002: 4; Irschick 1994: 4—10; Wagoner 2003: 785—6, 798—9). As co-producers, sections of the Indian population shared with the British the authority of knowledge they had engendered (Irschick 1994: 4, Peabody 2001: 841), this being also a situation that then questions the categories 'colonized' and 'colonizers' as neatly separable.

The claim about the novelty of colonial knowledge as well as its denial has arisen from the perception of colonialism as disjuncture or as continuity from the preceding phase of Indian history. Thus Dirks, who adopts the 'discontinuity' view, argues that colonialism in India had 'produced new forms of society that have been taken to be traditional; caste [is] a specifically colonial form of . . . civil society' (Dirks 2002: 60). Susan Bayly, on the other hand, believes that colonial processes did not lead to a rupture in indigenous conceptions. While her picture of Indian society is not static and she stresses that caste in contemporary India is not a continuation from 'ancient times' (Bayly 2002: 4, also, 3, 2, 65), she asserts that caste in its present form was 'engendered' in 'the early eighteenth century' (Bayly 2002: 4, also, 5, 25—7) and not during or because of colonial rule. Though the 'typing of people by caste or caste-like statuses was made considerably more comprehensive' in the late nineteenth century, none of these developments, she claims, were 'wholly new' (Bayly 2002: 124, also 80, 97). British rule, Bayly insists, merely 'expanded and sharpened', 'further consolidated', 'accelerated', and 'fostered' (Bayly 2002: 4, 65, 80 and 202) caste norms already in existence since the eighteenth century.

A certain onesidedness characterizing perceptions of colonialism is also reflected in analyses of colonial knowledge. In Dirks's account, for example, despite changes in the mode of production, knowledge always

appears in the service of the colonial regime. He refers, correctly, to the shift that occurred over the second half of the nineteenth century in the process of knowledge formation: the census commenced as an 'empirical project' (Dirks 2002: 202), surveys began to replace Sanskrit texts as the source of information about people, and, metaphorically speaking, 'anthropology supplanted history as the principal colonial modality of knowledge' (Dirks 2002: 43). How did this empirical shift relate to the text-based knowledge on caste produced by Indologists since the late eighteenth century? Instead of exploring the vast areas of conflict that emerged between different traditions of knowledge on questions regarding the real structure of caste and the sources of authentic information on the subject, Dirks insists on showing the continuity of Indological interpretation and its seamless blending with census surveys and anthropological research. Thus, he claims that the 'empirical project of the census was wedded to the . . . Orientalist categories' (Dirks 2002: 202), refers to the continuing colonial 'reliance on Brahmanic and textual authority' (Dirks 2002: 210), and writes of the 'prominence of Indologists and Indology in anthropological discourses on India' (Dirks 2002: 59). I question these suppositions below. However, let us first understand why the continuity of Indological interpretation into the later phase is so crucial for Dirks's hypothesis. Colonialism, Dirks believes, brought disruptions within indigenous society; with caste this happened when caste was 'refigured as a distinctly religious system' (Dirks 2002: 12). The religious form of caste was encapsulated in the 'dharmic idea of *varna*' (Dirks 2002: 60) which the Indologists culled from Sanskrit texts. Why must Dirks see the transformation of caste in religious terms? The influence upon him of Edward Said's concept of 'Orientalism' is apparent. The representation of caste as the religious 'other', he believes, allowed the colonial regime to proclaim its modernist self and deny Indians all political will and agency. This explains the persistence of the Indological thesis in Dirks's explanation, even as it leads him to make some rather incompatible claims: thus, in the late nineteenth century, he seems to argue, colonial knowledge of caste was both brahmanical and anthropological; similarly, Indians under the spell of colonial knowledge were supposedly imbibing a religious notion of caste

precisely when caste movements in various parts of the country were making political demands.

Susan Bayly, on the other hand, does not pay sufficient attention to the processes of knowledge production because she assumes colonialism brought about no fundamental change in the notion of caste. She fails to find any connection on the one hand between various theories of caste—materialistic and racial—propounded in the late nineteenth century, and on the other colonial governance. Instead, she says these theorizations were the consequence of personal initiatives by 'scholar-officials' who strove to 'make their mark in a wider learned world which had come to be dominated by ethnological debate' (Bayly 1995: 167, also 214; Bayly 2002: 119). Understandably, when examining the notion of caste in the late colonial phase, Bayly does not probe the role of census operations in shaping this notion, or inspiring ethnographic surveys and various theorizations of caste.

In my investigation here of caste in the colonial census, I try to go beyond the binary of 'discontinuity' and 'continuity'. I underline the presence of multiple spheres of knowledge production within the project of enumeration. The state did not necessarily have an unequivocal or decisive say in all these spheres. Implicit in my approach is a questioning of the cognition of the colonial regime as a singular structure. The census began with a conflict between the administrative and statistical perspectives on caste; in the latter phase, the state and the Western academy approached the subject with their respective agendas. The representation of caste in the census reports was thus far from uniform; at the same time, in the very process of enumeration the concept underwent a fundamental change. My main points are: I believe that caste, as conceived in contemporary academic writings and applied while framing the policies of the colonial and postcolonial state, is a new *idea*. It emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century in the course of, and because of, census operations. By implication, then, I suggest that the social form imagined by the term 'caste' had never previously existed in Indian society.

I should clarify here that when I claim that caste is a new idea, I am not reiterating the view often credited to Nicholas Dirks. A careful reading of his *Castes of Mind,* in fact, reveals Dirks's acute discomfort on the question of the 'invention' of caste: 'I hope to weave an argument far more complicated than that the British invented caste, though in one sense this is precisely what happened' (Dirks 2002: 9). Again, 'I will argue that caste (again, as we know it today) is a modern phenomenon . . . By this I do not mean to imply that it was simply invented by the too clever British . . . [Nevertheless] colonialism made caste what it is today' (Dirks 2002: 5). The cumulative weight of Dirks's arguments moves in favour of suggesting that under colonialism caste was transformed (and not invented) as 'a fundamentally religious social order' and was made 'far more pervasive' (Dirks 2002: 13). Why does Dirks find it so difficult to sustain the argument that caste is a new concept? First, because he does not, as explained above, fully recognize the novelty of the census which, with inputs from an-thropology, had the potential of producing new social forms. Second, and more important, like his adversaries from the 'continuity' camp, Dirks believes that caste did exist in precolonial times and, whatever its existing connotations, it was not a figment of the British imagination. This premise is not only inadequate, it is also misleading.

Caste is a foreign word which modern scholars have assumed to be an equivalent of *varna* or/and *jati* (Samarendra 2011: 51—2), entities that represent different, though not always unconnected, indigenous traditions. This assumption is questionable. In order to illustrate the non-equivalence of caste with *varna* and *jati,* I look briefly at their meanings. Caste has been variously defined as an endogamous, ethnic, occupational, ritualistic, or racial division. Underlying all these definitions are present the following two suppositions: that caste actually exists and can be observed in society, and that it has a fixed and uniform boundary, implying that communities across India called castes have something in common. The *varna* classification of society, when compared, seems to share the definitiveness of caste: as mentioned in the Sanskrit texts, there are four groups within this schema, the attributes of which are more or less consistent. Yet, unlike

caste, the *varna* system, scholars have pointed out, is text-based and does not exist on the social plane in the same form. No society across the Indian subcontinent is actually divided into merely four groups of Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra—often equated with priests, warriors, commoners, and the class of servants, respectively (Smith 1994: 3). The presence of *jatis,* on the other hand, can be observed in society. The similarity with caste, however, ends there. The connotation of *jati,* in contrast with caste, is far from uniform. For example, in vernacular literature we come across expressions such as the Lohar and the Sonar *jati* (professional communities), the Maratha and the Bangla *jati* (linguistic communities), the Hindu and the Mussalman *jati* (putatively, religious communities), the Munda and the Oraon *jati* (communities presently registered in government documents as tribes), the Vaidya and the Bhumihar *jati* (communities which are endogamous), *mardon ki jat* and *aurat jat* (community of men and community of women), etc. Evidently dissimilar, these communities are not necessarily endogamous either. If *jati* is to be equated with caste, as many contemporary scholars believe, we might ask which of the above-mentioned *jatis* could be treated as castes. And what might be the criteria of selection? So, what is caste—*varna* or *jati*? And when scholars speak of a pan-Indian caste system, what are they referring to —a system of *varna* or of *jatis?* I argue that caste is neither *varna* nor *jati*, though it masquerades as one or the other or both at the same time. And since caste is not the same as the other two, it must be a new category deployed for imagining Indian society. I continue using the word 'caste' despite the aforesaid objection because the colonial documents that I refer to employ the word. However, as I progress, I will regularly clarify the connotations of caste *vis-à-vis* its presumed indigenous equivalents.

The birth of caste was directly connected with the start of census operations in India from around the middle of the nineteenth century. The census dealt with population numbers. In Europe, statistics had emerged in the nineteenth century as a 'part of the technology of power in a modern state' (Hacking 1991: 181). Its introduction by the state in colonial India did not follow exactly the same pattern (Appadurai 1994:

315, Smith 1985: 173). Yet, it is widely argued that quantification rendered the colonized 'societies . . . knowable, and knowable in a so-called objective form' (Smith 1985: 173). Numbers relating to people and resources became a part 'of the illusion of bureaucratic control and a key to a colonial *imaginaire* (Appadurai 1994: 317). If number was the key to knowledge, what were the preconditions to be fulfilled to first articulate the socially shaped diverse caste identities in the objectified language of numerals? To analyse the implications of the census operations for caste, we must look at the procedures followed within the project.

The census was, first, the direct survey of a population; instead of surmising or referring to texts, enumerators went to people with a questionnaire, noting their number and attributes. The purpose was not merely to count but also to classify the population under different heads —age, sex, religion, caste, occupation, etc. The conduct of these two interrelated processes depended on several conditions. First, the entity to be counted had to be homogenous and discrete, with no overlapping boundaries. For example, people to be enumerated as Hindus had uniformly to be defined as such and separated, say, from Sikhs, Buddhists, and animists. Classification, on the other hand, referred to the practice of sorting, arranging, and aggregating the data in different columns and rows within a tabular format. The first step was thus to formulate the classificatory principles. The principles would be derived from the defining attributes of the entity to be classified. The census was a serialized pan-India project. The data that was collected was put to comparison across the provinces, as well as over the various editions of the census operations. The fulfilment of this very basic exercise hinged on consistency in the use of classificatory models. Uniformity in the criteria of identification and classification of communities was thus essential for a proper conduct of enumeration. And, once again, keeping in view the empirical nature of the project, these criteria had to be drawn not from texts but from lived social experience.

The given features of the census turned it into a unique exercise, different from all other projects—pre-colonial and colonial—of population assessment. While communities were enumerated by political

regimes even in medieval times (Peabody 2001, Guha 2003), the unit of enumeration was the household rather than the individual. Hence the difference in the indigenous terms: *khana-sumari* in medieval India referred to the preparation of household lists, while the census in colonial times was often called *mardum-sumari*, literally, the counting of men. Apart from not being direct surveys of population, pre-colonial enumerations did not follow a uniform scheme to classify people. Caste-sensitive household lists prepared by an officer of Marwar, Rajasthan, in the seventeenth century (cited in Peabody 2001: 824—9) clearly reveal these characteristics of medieval enumeration schedules, even if Peabody contends that they exhibit a similarity with the colonial census. Since the unit counted was the household, such lists neither present any aggregate figure of population nor always include communities which could be recognized as castes (see the tables cited in Peabody 2001: 827—8). Moreover, the classificatory schema differed from area to area. Though not unaware of these peculiarities, Peabody prefers to claim continuity and not the reverse between medieval household schedules and the colonial census (Peabody 2001: 819, 822—3). I believe the census was different even from the ethnographic surveys of the late nineteenth century; the latter, though drawing upon fieldwork, merely prepared an inventory of castes and their characteristics; there was no compulsion here to compare and classify the entries.

The novel features of the colonial census fundamentally affected the concept of caste. Direct enumeration meant that people were approached in person by enumerators. The responses of people to the query about their caste, in line with the varied nature of *jati,* showed great divergence, prompting questions about whether what was being counted related at all to a single entity. Simultaneously, the empirical gaze of the census raised doubts about the relevance of the *varna* model found in Sanskrit texts that had been accepted as authentic in colonial writings since the late eighteenth century, thus creating uncertainties about the categories available for classifying castes. Referring to the complexities associated with the process of enumeration, Hacking writes that the 'printing of numbers was a surface effect. Behind it lay

new technologies for classifying and enumerating . . . Categories had to be invented into which people could conveniently fall in order to be counted' (Hacking 2004: 2—3). The project of the census had generated the burden of identifying and classifying castes without possessing the intellectual tools required to accomplish the task. Compelled by circumstances, the colonial state took recourse to anthropology to define and discipline caste. But the agenda of the state and the discipline of anthropology were far from coterminous. This notwithstanding, anthropological concepts, operating alongside a statistical frame, profoundly shaped the idea of caste in the course of the first five decades of the census operations.

I. Beginnings of the Census

Assessments of the population in colonial India had started from the early years of the nineteenth century (Cohn 1990: 233—6). These, however, were indirect appraisals, there being little uniformity in the methods followed. One of the earliest proposals in favour of a census appeared in the *Memoir on the Statistics of the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency*, where it was recommended that the population returns be 'compiled not from averages of the number of persons to a house, but from actual enumeration of the people' (Shakespear 1848: 173). Accordingly, the first census based on a direct survey of the population took place on 1 January 1853, in the North Western Provinces (hereafter NWP).

Even before the census began, the revenue department had been generating population data which appeared as adjuncts amidst other agrarian details: in the *Memoir*, for example, these occupied a few of the columns in the tables entitled 'Statistical Return of Land and Population' (Shakespear 1848: 12, 18, 169). The NWP census of 1853—an independent and separate project of enumeration—signalled the gradual release of population data from the control of the revenue establishment. The direction of change was reflected in the addition of new columns during subsequent censuses giving information about various aspects of people's lives. The enumeration of caste started from the second census of the NWP in 1865 and continued to be a

prominent part of the colonial census till 1931. There was no grand design of knowing and controlling the population—as generally attributed to the colonial state—inspiring the inclusion of caste in the census of the NWP. The objectives were rather limited: caste identity was expected to 'facilitate classification [of the population] into "agricultural" and "non-agricultural"' (Plowden 1867: 1). In addition, information on castes was supposed to help check customs such as 'infanticide' prevailing amongst some of them (Plowden 1867: 30, 48).

Caste, though included in the census, proved difficult to tackle. The enumerators discovered during the surveys that society was not patterned according to the fourfold *varna* division comprising Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. Instead, in the localities they encountered *jatis*—communities with unfamiliar names, uneven status, and dissimilar characteristics. For example, the report on the census of the NWP in 1865 showed Sikh, Jain, Goshain, Jogee, Sunni, etc., to be a part of the same caste table that included the Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra (Plowden 1867: 80—1). The caste table in the report on the census of Oudh in 1869 presented a similar picture. Apart from Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaishya, the group called 'higher caste of Hindu' included Bengali and Punjabi (linguistic groups), Sikh and Jain (religious sects), Kayasth (scribal community), Marwari and Kashmiri (regional groups), and Jats—the local agricultural commu-nity (William 1869: 86). Colonial scholars, I should clarify, were not unaware of the existence of *jatis.* However, in the earlier decades these were co-opted within the *varna* framework: their existence was not interpreted to deny the validity of *varna.* By contrast the empiricist view, Inden writes, was not concerned with 'the bookish *varnas*' but the *jatis* or 'the real, empirical . . . localized, hereditary, endogamous (in-marrying) groups' (Inden 1990: 59).

From the very early rounds, census officials were faced with a serious challenge: which of those diverse *jatis* enlisted in the census schedules were castes, and how were they to be classified in view of the fact that the *varna* framework was not considered relevant any more? The diverse identity of the *jatis* precluded the possibility of cataloguing these according to any uniform classificatory principle. The caste table

in the report on the census of the NWP in 1865 had several columns within which all the *jatis* were placed: first there were four columns headed by Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra; then came five columns named after Sikhs and four sections of the Jains; following which came fourteen columns of 'religious sects', three columns of 'travellers', and finally one of those 'Hindoos whose caste is not known' (Plowden 1867: 81). On the other hand, the census of Oudh in 1869 employed the following nine columns for the purpose of classification: 'Europeans, Eurasians and Native Christians, Higher castes of Muhammadans, Muhammadans converts from the higher castes of Hindus, Lower castes of Muhammadan, Higher castes of Hindu, Lower castes of Hindu, Aboriginal castes, Religious mendicants and Miscellaneous' (William 1869: 72).

The enumeration of castes during the early census operations had thus generated conflicting trends. Census reports from the initial decades show that the caste list of every province differed from that of every other because of the presence of heterogeneous *jatis* in the country's diverse areas. Further, every province seemed to have adopted a distinct classificatory table keeping in mind the nature of the local *jatis.* However, the operation of the census depended on the ability to compare data. Only by comparing and aggregating caste data from the various provinces could one know the number of people within a specific caste in any province, or the country as a whole, over different periods of time. But the dissimilarity in the caste lists as well as in the classificatory tables that arrived from the first decade of caste enumerations seemed to deny any possibility of data comparison. The census faced an unresolved contradiction: its schedules attested to the heterogeneity *of jatis* whereas its processes demanded homogeneity of the communities to be counted. This problem was to assume acute proportions with the inauguration of the pan-Indian decennial census series and large increases in the collection of data.

II. Caste and Statistical Disorder

The pan-Indian decennial census series commencing 1871—2 suffered from several defects. It did not cover all the regions of British India, nor

was it conducted on the same day. However, its most glaring failure related to the classification of castes. [1] 'Great pains have been taken', it was admitted in a memorandum presented before the British parliament, to arrange castes of different provinces in a definite order; the outcome, however, was 'not satisfactory, owing partly to the intrinsic difficulties of the subject, and partly to the absence of a uniform plan of classification' (Waterfield 1875: 20).

In order to avoid the shortcomings of the preceding census, in 1877 the Secretary of State dispatched a set of measures for consideration to the Government of India. The Government of India constituted a three-member Census Committee comprising W.C. Plowden, H. Beverley, and WR. Cornish, all experienced in conducting census operations, to comment on the draft. Subsequently the draft, along with the opinion of the committee, was circulated among provincial administrators for their response. The transaction between the Secretary of State, the committee, and the provincial officials on the question of caste enumeration reveals that the census was being riven apart by two conflicting concerns: the statistical commitment to arrange data, and the administrative desire to seek information about the subject population. I elaborate below the respective approaches in order to avoid a monolithic representation of the colonial state, and to historicize the circumstances that led the state to directly seek ethnographic knowledge in order to map caste groups.

For the Secretary of State, who had little direct role in the administration of India, the census was a statistical project in which caste did not merit a place. The communities enlisted as castes varied, lacking any fixed and uniform boundary. He observed that often a man would state that he was 'by "caste" a "marhatta" when he is a Kunbi of the Marhatta nation; that he is by "occupation" a carpenter when he is a cultivator of the carpenter caste; that he is by "religion" a Brahmin, when he is a Brahmin by caste.' [2] In addition to such uncertainties surrounding the identification of castes, there was the problem of inconsistency in classification. Referring to the preceding census, the Secretary of State said: 'In some of the provinces the Hindoo population

was classified according to . . . four main divisions, but in others they were shown . . . with no distinct order, or were arranged according to the general occupation of caste.' [3] He was convinced that 'unless some better arrangements are made, it would probably be advisable to omit the column [of caste] altogether.' [4] If it was still 'considered desirable to retain the column', he emphasized, 'each provincial compiler should be instructed how to summarise the figures, so as to admit of their being brought into one statement for the whole of India.' [5]

The stance of the Census Committee was shaped by conflicting pulls. Being erstwhile administrators, its members believed that 'enquiry in connection with caste . . . might add much interesting information to our knowledge of native life.' [6] Their immediate concern, however, was the statistical arrangement of caste data. Recounting the experience of the earlier censuses, the committee wrote that there was 'no part of the work of compilation which presents so many difficulties, involves so much labour, and at the same time is so unsatisfactory when completed, as the working up of the caste tables.' [7] Conflicting pulls led to contradictory recommendations. Caste, the committee proposed, would feature in the enumerator's schedule: 'Following the precedent of the later enumerations [NWP census 1865 onwards] we have provided in the schedule the means of collecting information in regard to the castes and sects.' [8] However, this information was not to be compiled or presented in 'any specific table for the distribution of the people by castes.' In fact, the committee declared, 'We do not . . . recommend—indeed we are completely opposed to—any classification by caste of the Hindu population.' [9] The proposal to collect and yet not collate caste data was justified on the ground that these formed the subject of 'special enquiry, and can be . . . undertaken by an antiquarian rather than a statistical authority.' [10]

Neither viewing the census as a statistical exercise, nor carrying the burden of processing data, a large number of provincial officials, convinced of the administrative relevance of caste, favoured its inclusion in the project. 'The object of the census is manifold; it is not

merely . . . fiscal', contended the Government of Madras. Information about caste, it asserted, was 'absolutely required for public purposes . . . all castes should be enumerated. The registry of all is most essential.' [11] Similarly, the Deputy Inspector General of Police, NWP, urged 'a complete sub-divisional caste statement . . . of Rajputs or Thakurs, Jats and Ahirs'. The information, he argued, 'will be [of] untold value in all enquiries connected with infanticide, and will be perhaps of considerable political utility.' [12] Not every provincial government supported the enumeration of castes in the census. Nevertheless, whether opposing or endorsing the measure, they were guided by local administrative considerations and not the statistical viability of the exercise.

The discrepancy between statistical commitment and administrative concerns was also reflected in the categories proposed to classify castes. The Secretary of State's primary objective was to ensure a uniform tabulation of castes should the subject be retained in the census. He therefore recommended that it might be 'better to . . . arrange the Hindoos generally under . . . Brahmins . . . Kshatriyas . . . Vaisyas . . . and Sudras.' [13] He also ruled out any attempt to identify castes among Muslims in the census; he would not have, he stated, any 'subdivision of Islam' along caste lines. [14]

The Census Committee however found the text-based schema proposed by the Secretary of State for classification unrealistic. 'We do not consider . . . [the] suggestion to recognize only the four main divisions of Manu', the committee argued, 'satisfactory . . . whether this fourfold division ever really existed [or not] in practice . . . nearly all trace of it has disappeared in the present day.' [15] Obliged to ensure statistical uniformity yet not oblivious of the observed social realities, the committee concluded that classification, if 'considered . . . necessary', could be 'effected in a far simpler manner' by placing castes 'under . . . a. Brahmans b. Kshatriyas c. Other Hindus, including Sikhs.' [16]

Provincial administrators opposed both the text-based and the pan-Indian classifications on the grounds that these disregarded the local situation. The Government of Bombay, for example, contended that the fourfold 'division of castes' was 'not . . . workable' in the province as it would 'class . . . among the Sudras, the Bania, the Maratha, and the Dher—three classes which are completely distinct from each other.' [17] The Lieutenant Governor of Punjab was more categorical in demanding that the 'enumerator's form should . . . have direct reference to the leading facts in the native society.' [18]

I will digress here to underline the role of the empirical method used during the census surveys in the constitution of a new idea of caste. The understanding of caste in colonial writings in the late-eighteenth and the early-nineteenth century was shaped by Sanskrit texts. William Jones and Henry Colebrook, despite being aware of *jatis,* treated the text-derived *varna* order as representing the original and authentic caste system. The census brought a fundamental change to this perspective. Rather than continuing with the *varna* model, as Dirks suggests, census officials repeatedly rejected it as unreal. The changed circumstances were reflected in their critique of the deemed propagator of the model: Manu. Thus Cornish, when compiling the report on the census of Madras in 1871, wrote: 'in a critical inquiry regarding the origin of caste we can place no reliance upon the statements made in the Hindu sacred writings. Whether there was ever a period in which the Hindus were composed of four classes is exceedingly doubtful' (Cornish 1874: 122). Similarly C.F. Magrath, the officer compiling the list of castes from Bihar, stated that 'it was necessary, if the classification was to be of any use, that the now meaningless division into the four castes alleged to have been made by Manu should be put aside' (cited in Beverley 1872: 155). In 1877 the Census Committee wondered whether the *varna* model 'ever really existed in practice', and in a report on the census of Punjab in 1881 Ibbetson pronounced this schema as 'artificial' (Ibbetson 1883: 174).

The critique of Manu was addressed in a broader sense to the text-based expositions of Indian society. Yet, as Trautmann points out, the

textual categories, though disputed, could not be discarded during the empirical shift (Trautmann 1997: 26, 191-206). Thus, while the *varna* model was rejected by the enumerators, some of its components still found a place in the census reports when these passed the test of physical verification. Recognized as 'still a living entity', Brahmans were included in the classificatory table of the report on the census of NWP in 1872 (Plowden 1873: lxxix); for the same reason the Census Committee recommended the inclusion of 'Brahmans and Rajputs' in the tables for the proposed census of India in 1881 (for further details, see Samarendra 2011: 54). The integrity of the *varna* order was, in the process, broken; hollowed out of earlier connotations, the constituting groups when individually appropriated were suffused with new meanings. The census, I believe, was accompanied with a process of what might be termed the empiricalization of textual traditions. In the course of enumeration, the components of the *varna* order, i.e., Brahman, Kshatriya, etc., were empiricalized: i.e. attributed a visible and verifiable body. Caste, henceforth, was recognized necessarily as an empirical category. It is in the context of empirical inquiry, I should add, that the academic tradition of counterposing *varna* and *jati* in terms of textual *vs* real (or ideal *vs* actual, original *vs* contemporary) started. This tradition continues in the writings on caste even today.

Despite all efforts, discrepancies persisted in the census. For instance, in the enumerator's schedule, the class of 'Hindu' had been subdivided into castes, but the total number of Hindus, in 1881, did not match the sum total of caste persons—the numbers being, respectively, 187,937,450 and 188,121,772 (see Plowden 1883: 277). This mismatch occurred because certain communities, though classified as castes, had not been counted as Hindus. The conflicting numbers cast doubts on the authenticity of the census project. It was increasingly being acknowledged that to count caste it was first necessary to know what caste was. In 1882 W.C. Plowden, the outgoing Census Commissioner, recommended that in every province 'some officer who has a taste for, and a knowledge of, archaeological research' should be deputed to compile information about caste. The 'advantage of having such information at hand at the next census', he concluded, needed 'no

comment'. [19] Responding to the recommendation, the Government of Bengal appointed H.H. Risley, in 1885, to conduct a survey of castes and occupations of the people of the province. [20]

This ethnographic move was forced on the state because of the conjunction of two developments—the empirical mode of enquiry and the beginning of all-India census operations. Empirical investigations, not absent in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century (Pels 1999), had cast doubt on the existence of *varna*. Nevertheless, the belief of colonial officials in the existence of a pan-Indian caste structure was unchanged. Several factors sustained this belief. The first related to the burden of history. In the body of knowledge about Indian society that census officials inherited from the Sanskritists, the existence of caste had been already registered. Further, the Sanskritists had addressed both *varna* and *jati* as caste. So, even when the *varna* order seemed in doubt, *jatis* continued to be counted as castes. The second factor was linked to the project of the state. The census operations produced a social map of India. At the very moment when *varna* and other text-based concepts were being questioned, the census was reconstituting pan-Indian identities—caste, Hindu, etc.—within and through its statistical format. The census operations followed the patterns of administrative division: district census reports were compiled to produce a provincial report; provincial reports together, in turn, generated the general report on the census of India. Implicit in this format was the assumption of the universality of caste, so that castes from the different parts of the country could be added up and presented in a master table of castes. Therefore the imperative thrust upon census officials was to uncover the essence of caste, to abstract certain defining features on the basis of which castes could be sifted and identified from amidst the multifarious *jatis* and then placed within a new pan-Indian classificatory grid. As Cohn notes, most of 'the basic treatises on the . . . caste system written during the period 1880 to 1950 were . . . by men who had important positions either as census commissioners for all of India or for a province' (Cohn 1990: 241-2).

III. Anthropology and the Colonial State

The completion of the census of 1881 marked a watershed in the history of the project in India. Persistent problems in statistical com-putations had rendered untenable a continuation of the census as a project concerned merely with the collection and compilation of data. From the concluding decades of the nineteenth century, the colonial state came into closer contact with anthropology in order to comprehend caste. The results of the survey of Bengal that Risley had undertaken were published in 1891 in four volumes entitled *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*; subsequently, under the generic title of *Tribes and Castes*, glossaries of communities were compiled for the North-Western Provinces and Oudh (1896), Southern India (1909), Punjab and North-Western Provinces (1911), and the Central Provinces (1916). The census of 1901 went on to witness the most extensive use of anthropological concepts to elucidate caste. Prior to the ethnographic surveys sponsored by the provincial governments, certain census officials such as James Bourdillon and Denzil Ibbetson had tried to analyse caste. These attempts were a consequence of personal curiosity and not part of state initiative. The development in the post-1881 phase has been interpreted by scholars in favour of the argument that, in late-nineteenth-century India, the state had become 'ethnographic' and knowledge anthropological; that the state actively collaborated with European academic institutions to produce this knowledge in order to 'understand and control its subjects' (Dirks 2002: 43—4; also Metcalf 1995; Inden 1990). The situation was far more complicated.

The agenda of British institutions engaged in anthropological research in the late nineteenth century was very different from that of the state in India. Anthropology was focused on the societies of Africa and Asia, which were designated 'primitive'. Placed on the other end of a linear scale, these societies supposedly portrayed the prehistory of mankind, from which was traced a universal trajectory of progress reaching its pinnacle in contemporary Europe. Academic associations, Stocking clarifies, were 'little concerned with the application of anthropology to colonial problems' (Stocking 1987: 272); it was the objective of illustrating and elucidating primitive social forms that enthused those advocating the study of tribes and castes. These

institutions used the occasion of every impending survey of the population in India to impress upon the local government the necessity of conducting enquiries in the service of science. Thus, William Flower, President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (hereafter BAAS), suggested that the census of 1891 offered 'an admirable opportunity to collect lists' of exogamous and endoga- mous subdivisions of tribes and castes. 'The information obtained', he continued, 'would have great scientific value.' [21] Again, before the census of 1901 the BAAS sent a set of requests, including one to 'obtain . . . a series of photographs of typical individuals of the various races, and . . . of archaic industries.' [22]

The objective of the colonial state was by contrast rather limited. By agreeing to seek ethnographic knowledge, even though for the limited purpose of preparing a list of castes and tribes, the state had exposed itself to influence from the Western academy, even as its initial and primary concern remained the classification of castes. Hence it was keen to limit the investment, both material and academic, in anthropological research and keep it germane to the specific problem. What followed then was a continuous process of conflict and negotiation between the state and the academy over the size and direction of ethnographic surveys. Rejecting the suggestion of the BAAS to collect data about endogamous and exogamous practices, the Government of India declared that it would be 'quite impracticable for the enumerators . . . to undertake the task [and] would greatly increase the risk of inaccuracy in the statistics generally.' [23] By the time of the next round of the census, the involvement of the government in ethnographic exercises had indeed increased. Nevertheless, this did not prevent it from setting forth 'conditions' for receiving the state's 'assistance' in scientific ventures. Reacting to the proposal submitted by the BAAS, in 1901, the government wrote: 'assistance . . . can only be given under certain conditions . . . The scheme must not cost much . . . must produce definite results . . . and . . . must not impose much extra work on the district officers.' [24]

The Western knowledge complex and the colonial state came together but with differing objectives that found expression in the dilemma noticeable in the writings of Risley. During the survey of Bengal, Risley had played a leading role in applying anthropological concepts to the study of caste; as the Census Commissioner in 1901, he had also introduced the most far-reaching measures for what subsequently turned out to be the final attempt in the census to implement the state's programme of classifying castes. The presence in his ethnographic inquiries of the two contexts, academic and administrative, was indicated by the way the author of *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* was introduced on the book's title page. Next to the author's name it said 'Indian Civil Service'. But what separated him from predecessors associated with population surveys was an additional designation—'Officer of the French Academy' (Officer, D'Academie Francaise). Risley himself had no doubts that his enquiries carried a larger scientific agenda. 'It was understood . . . from the first', he wrote, 'that the objects to be aimed at . . . were partly scientific and partly administrative.' 'From the standpoint of . . . anthropology', he continued, 'it was hoped that it might be possible . . . to arrive at fresh data throwing light on the ethnological problems . . . discussed in Europe.' 'The principal points', he added, were 'the early history of marriage, the development of the family, modes of relationship, the early history of inheritance . . . and . . . something may be done to render available, for the use of scientific men in Europe, the large body of barbarous or semi-barbarous custom, both Aryan and non- Aryan, which still survives in India' (Risley 1891: vi).

Risley acted under certain constraints: funds for the surveys came from the state, and the researchers, including Risley himself, happened to be its officers. This created an obligation to justify the demand for detailed anthropological research *vis-à-vis* the specific requirements of the state. Risley admitted that his enquiries might seem 'to cover a far wider range than . . . contemplated by the Census Commissioner [WC. Plowden, 1881] and the Government of India' (Risley 1891: v). Further, 'many persons will set down the enquiry as practically useless' or as 'luxuries' that would have 'no direct bearing upon the actual work of

administration' (Risley 1891: vii). Several moves were forced under the circumstances. The 'native society [was] governed by rules', Risley declared, and anthropology could lay bare those rules, that 'system upon which the whole native population regulates its domestic and social relations' (Risley 1891: vii). Apart from asserting their general utility for administration, the particular efficacy of anthropological ideas in classifying caste was, naturally, proclaimed. However, often it was only by going beyond and against the premises of contemporary anthropology that this instrumentality of knowledge could be claimed. Thus Risley, in order to classify castes, referred to Brahmanical injunctions, mythical history, public opinion, etc., and accommodated these in the same report where hitherto he had discussed concepts considered scientific—racial division, totemism, anthropometrical measurements, etc.

The existence of an administrative context alongside the intellectual one in projects sponsored by the state meant that colonial knowledge could never be exclusively academic (anthropological) in nature. However, before exploring the nature of this knowledge, we should ask what enabled Risley to contend that anthropology—which operated within a universal frame and which, in general, studied 'primitive' societies—could even address the specific classificatory questions faced by a state in a colony. Further, how could an exposition that claimed to be scientific accommodate Brahmanical injunctions and mythical histories within its explanatory sweep? The history of the discipline of anthropology might provide an explanation here.

Anthropology in Britain had emerged through a process of conflict and convergence between what were subsequently claimed to be its sub-disciplines (Stocking 1987: chapter 7). Philology, ethnography, ethnology, anthropology, etc., had existed in the mid-nineteenth century as overlapping yet separate fields of study, the inclusion of which under 'Anthropology' was sought by styling the new discipline as the science of mankind. Early in its career, anthropology could not impose on its deemed branches the disciplinary markers in terms of method or themes of investigation. Rather, as Stocking writes, it 'remained for a long time a loosely defined field embracing various

forms of inquiry on more or less equal terms' (Stocking 1987: 270, also 268-9).

Risley's writings illustrate the state of the discipline. In order to understand how 'the main results of the Bengal inquiries' were organized, it was first necessary, he wrote, 'to take stock of . . . terminology' (Risley 1891: xxv), in particular, of the three key terms—ethnography, ethnology, and anthropometry—belonging to 'the circle of studies grouped together under the head of anthropology' (Risley 1891: xxvi). Let us concern ourselves, at present, with the first two. Ethnography, Risley explained, 'collects and arranges large masses of social data' (Risley 1891: xxvi); it thus dealt with the descriptive details about caste. Ethnology, on the other hand, 'applies the comparative method of investigation, and frames by this means hypotheses concerning the origin of the tribes themselves' (Risley 1891: xxvi). This separation of the fields of inquiry meant that while ethnography took care of sundry details, i.e. Brahmanical injunction, mythical history, etc., that were relevant for classifying castes, ethnology could demarcate a scientific domain for itself to offer a theoretical exposition about the origin of caste. The loose structure of the discipline allowed anthropology to be pressed in the service of both administration and the academy.

The exposition of caste in the ethnographic texts compiled during the closing decades of the nineteenth century and after was, thus, far from homogeneous. In the narrative presented in the *Tribes and Castes* volumes as well as the report on the census of 1901, the two separate spheres, academic and administrative, were clearly identifiable. In the beginning of these texts there appeared an *ethnological* account ('Introduction' or 'Introductory Essay' in the *Tribes and Castes* volumes: see Risley 1891; Crooke 1896; Thurston & Rangachari 1909; Russell and Lal 1916) responsive to the research agenda of Western scholarly institutions. Then followed an *ethnographic* section where, as per the programme of the colonial state, either a glossary or a classification of castes was presented. The questions asked, the method followed, the informants contacted, and the audience addressed differed in the two accounts. Yet a crucial link also tied the two: ethnology was supposed to

decode ethnography, the theory of caste was expected to help the state in its practice of classifying caste groups.

Referring to the writings of Risley, I examine the two narratives of caste. The ethnological explanation Risley had presented initially in *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*; this was further elaborated in the census report of 1901. The central purpose of this explanation was to reconstitute the idea of caste: its origin, history, and features, at a juncture when text-based concepts stood questioned and *jatis*, though enumerated as castes, revealed no common unifying features. The ethnographic version described the procedure followed during the census of 1901 to classify castes. Rather than corroborating, the ethnographic proceedings exposed the limits of ethnological knowledge and simultaneously revealed the role of divergent influences in the project of classification. Yet, despite the given differences, both ethnological and ethnographic elucidations contributed to the making of the idea of caste.

IIIa. Ethnology of Caste

In the 'Introductory Essay' entitled 'Caste in relation to marriage' that preceded the section on ethnographic findings from the survey of Bengal, Risley presented his ethnological formulations. Caste, in this account, was portrayed as an aspect of primitive society. The characterization was reached through several moves: caste was situated within an evolutionary paradigm and defined in universal terms; scientific theories and tools were applied to corroborate this definition; simultaneously, local connotations associated with the communities called castes were ignored and suppressed. The basis of caste, Risley argued, was race (though Risley used physiological criteria to identify races, he was not the first to use the term in the Indian context: see Trautmann 1997: chapter 7). Drawing upon head, nose, and stature measurements, anthropometry detected the presence of distinct races underneath the caste names. By recognizing biology as the formative influence behind caste, what the ethnological exposition denied was the relevance of the sphere of the social; the social became merely a reflection of the biological. That caste was a form that had not evolved

beyond the physical or natural state was held as the primary pointer of its primitive lineage.

Elaborating this hypothesis, Risley contended that the customs and practices hitherto used to judge the identity or status of castes were not authentic indicators. The original customs of the 'aboriginal tribes' had got distorted with 'the progress of the great religious and social movement' (Risley 1891: xv) called 'Brahmanism'. Brahmanism referred to the process whereby the 'aboriginal tribes' attempted 'to enrol themselves in one of the leading castes' (Risley 1891: xvi) of the 'Aryan Hindus' by emulating the customs and practices of the latter. This 'wholesale borrowing of customs and ceremonies which goes on among the various social groups in India', added Risley, 'makes it practically impossible to arrive at any certain conclusions by examining these practices' (Risley 1903: 493).

What then could reveal the authentic self of the various castes? In the midst of a continuous mixing of customs and practices, what had remained unaltered as a consequence of the practice of caste endogamy (which had prevented any large-scale intermixture of blood), Risley believed, were the physical features of these communities. And physical profiles could be traced with the help of anthropometry. Unlike Europe, where anthropometry felt 'hindered . . . by the constant intermixture of races', in India, Risley contended, it found a suitable 'field': 'Nowhere else . . . [do] we find the population of a large continent broken up into an infinite number of mutually exclusive aggregates, the members of which are forbidden . . . to marry outside . . . In a society thus organized . . . differences of physical type, however produced in past time . . . manifest a high degree of persistence, and that the science which seeks to trace and express such differences would find a peculiarly favourable field for its operations' (Risley 1891: xxvi-xxvii). Anthropometry did not merely discover the races, it reconstituted the difference between Europe and India, between a civilized and a primitive society.

Anthropometrical measurements of 'nearly 6000 persons, representing 89 of the leading castes and tribes in Northern India' (Risley 1891: xxx—xxxi) were taken during the survey of Bengal. Though no

physical statistics were collected during the census of 1901, Risley consulted such data gathered by individuals from other provinces before the present census (Risley 1903: 494). Drawing upon the available sources, he identified seven 'physical types' (Risley 1903: 500) living in India, of which three were primary: Aryan, Dravidian, and Mongoloid. [25] The Aryan and Dravidian represented the 'two extreme types of feature and physique' (Risley 1891: xxxi). The Aryans were 'marked by a relatively long (dolichocephalic) head; a straight, finely cut (lepto-rhine) nose . . . stature . . . fairly high . . . complexion . . . a very light transparent brown'; among the Dravidians, 'the head usually inclines to be dolichocephalic, but all other characters present a marked contrast to the Aryan. The nose is thick and broad . . . colour of the skin varies from very dark brown to a shade closely approaching black' (Risley 1891: xxxii).

In the continuance of these 'physical types' was located the rationale of caste and the origin of the 'caste system'. The presence of physical types affirmed, Risley argued, that 'the race sentiment . . . rests upon a foundation of fact' (Risley 1891: i—ii); it 'supplied the motive principle of caste' (Risley 1903: 489). The genesis of caste happened in the remote past when the Aryans, after making 'their way into India' (Risley 1903: 511), came into contact with the Dravidians. Anxious to maintain their racial purity, the former 'displayed . . . a marked antipathy to marriage with persons of alien race, and devised an elaborate system of taboo for the prevention' (Risley 1891: xxxviii) of such ties. Hence, Risley concluded, 'the motive principle of Indian caste is to be sought in the antipathy of the higher race for the lower, of the fair-skinned Aryan for the black Dravidian' (Risley 1891: xxxviii).

His explanation of the genesis of caste, Risley believed, was borne out by universal experience. 'Whenever in the history of the world one people has subdued another', he wrote, 'the conquerors have taken the women of the country as concubines or wives, but have given their . . . daughters in marriage only among themselves' (Risley 1903: 555). This partial check on intermarriage would be temporary where the opposing groups belonged to the same race. 'Where on the other hand marked

distinctions of race and colour intervene', the Census Commissioner explained, 'the . . . tendency . . . is towards the formation of a class of half-breeds . . . who marry among themselves and are to all intents and purposes a caste.' 'In this literal or physiological sense', he asserted, 'caste is not confined to India. It occurs . . . in the Southern States of the American Commonwealth, where Negroes intermarry with Negroes . . . [and] among the half-breeds of Canada, Mexico and South America' (Risley 1903: 555).

Western academic ideas when applied to colonies, I should add, did not escape modifications and distortions. For instance, Risley, drawing upon anthropological writings, had mentioned that the respective significance of the shape of the head and skin colour, for the purpose of identifying a race, varied; the former was a decisive indicator (Risley 1903: 497), the latter a non-definitive marker (Risley 1891: xxxii). Yet it was skin colour that was used to set Dravidians apart from Aryans, despite the fact that both carried a similar head- form (dolichocephalic).

Biology thus produced the motive for endogamy, the boundary that could demarcate a caste; biology also provided the means, in the shape of the nose, to assess the status of a caste. 'If we take a series of castes', Risley wrote, 'and arrange them . . . so that the caste with the finest nose shall be at the top, and that with the coarsest at the bottom, it will be found that this order substantially corresponds with the accepted order of social precedence' (Risley 1903: 498). A fine or coarse nose reflected the proportion of Aryan and/or Dravidian blood in a caste and hence held a clue to its status. It was therefore laid down as a 'law' that 'in those parts of India where there is an appreciable strain of Dravidian blood . . . the social status of the members of a particular group varies in inverse ratio to the mean relative width of their noses' (Risley 1903: 498).

The cognition of biology—skin colour, shape of nose, etc.—as the influence that produced and ordered caste was informed by a wider understanding of primitive societies. It was believed that in such societies, unlike in the Western world, the social (cor)responded to the

call of the biological/natural. Thus Risley, who correlated the status of caste with the shape of noses, went on to assert that this was not the only instance where 'the two sets of observation—social and physical—bear out and illustrate each other' (Risley 1891: xxxiv). The 'social gradation of the Indian caste system', he added, could be compared 'to a series of geological deposits' (Risley 1891: xxvii)—the 'lowest castes preserve the most primitive customs, just as the oldest geological formations contain the simplest forms of organic life' (Risley 1891: xxvii—xxviii; for the use of geological motifs in race theory, see Guha 1998: 425—7). The Dravidian was 'the oldest' (Risley 1903: 508), 'the most primitive' (Risley 1903: 506) of the Indian races, 'organized on a characteristic tribal basis' (Risley 1903: 516), observing 'animistic religion' and 'a primitive system of totemism' (Risley 1903: 508) where totems named after 'an animal, a tree, a plant' (Risley 1903: 530) designated the exogamous septs. The Aryans, on the other hand, were a later/newer entrant and therefore credited with more complex structures. They introduced the system of caste (caste was thus an Aryan institution), followed a distinct religion called Hinduism, and exogamous sections (*gotras*) within the highest Aryan castes were 'eponymous', i.e. these traced their descent from a 'mythical *rishi* or inspired saint' (Risley 1891: 1) rather than any animal or tree.

The evolutionary paradigm had a wider impact on colonial writings in the late nineteenth century than is often recognized. I illustrate this by identifying the premises shared by Denzil Ibbetson and Herbert Risley, scholars who have at times been contrasted to demonstrate the diversity in colonial ethnography (Bayly 2002: 126—43). Both scholars, though comprehending caste differently, undertook similar explanatory steps to arrive at their respective formulations. They began by pointing out that caste was originally produced by influences (e.g. occupational division, racial separation) operational also in other primitive societies. Both then proceeded to identify the present form of caste as a deviation from the universal trajectory and asked what might have caused it. Risley questioned why 'the Aryan race, which in South Europe . . . modified its physical type by free intermixture with Turanian elements, displayed in India a marked antipathy to marriage with persons of alien

race?' The answer, he stated, lay 'in the fact that in India alone were the Aryans brought into close contact with an unequivocally black race' (Risley 1891: xxxviii). [26]

Was the idea of deviation from the universal path applied only to comprehend caste, or was it an integral part of colonial representation of societies across Asia and Africa? Further, did the deviant state, as in the case of caste, signify the innate otherness of the colonized *vis-à-vis* Europeans? Here I address only the second question. Contrary to what scholars (Inden 1990: 49, 57, 74; Metcalf 1995: 113-14, 120; Dirks 2002: 3-5) claim, caste, when explicated *within a universal paradigm,* was not seen as a form unique or peculiar to India; it was not a sign of India's otherness. Risley had traced the features of caste also among 'the half-breeds of Canada, Mexico and South America', and only 'in its most developed form', he believed, was the caste system 'confined to India' (Risley 1903: 496). Earlier, Ibbetson had argued that caste was not 'peculiar to the Hindu nation'. Rather, 'caste in India [was] what we call position or rank in England', although in the case of the former 'special circumstances have combined to preserve . . . the hereditary nature of occupation.' Yet, he concluded, it was 'a difference of degree rather than of kind' (Ibbetson 1883: 173). The denial of the uniqueness of caste was a precondition for the application of universal academic theories. For, the representation of Indian society as an inherently irrational entity would have questioned the very need or possibility of using any scientific theory to understand it. An object must be assumed to have properties amenable to scientific investigation to make it eligible to such an analysis. Thus, when ideas or customs shared by a people precluded the scope of rational inquiry, Risley made use of human bodies to incorporate India within a racial hypothesis and explain the genesis of caste.

The ethnological explanation, informed as it was by Western academic concepts, brought about a fundamental change in the status of Indians assisting the colonial projects. During the very early years of the census, revenue officials procured the population data; for caste-specific information they depended on local scholars, particularly those

acquainted with Sanskrit texts. For instance, Plowden, during the census of the NWP in 1865, admitted that he was 'not in a position to add any information [on caste]'; that Siva Prasad, the Joint Inspector of Schools in the Benaras Circle, was preparing an 'alphabetical list' of castes which, when completed, would be of 'much value' (Plowden 1867: 92-3). In the following years two developments—the imposition of statistical order and the critique of *varna*—started cir-cumscribing the role of Indians. Subsequently, ethnographic surveys, beginning in the aftermath of the 1881 census, generated a corpus of knowledge of caste that claimed authenticity by aligning itself not with Sanskrit texts but Western academic disciplines. It is quite revealing that though Risley thanked many Indians for assistance during the survey of Bengal (Risley 1891: x), he acknowledged his intellectual debts exclusively to Western scholars: William Flower for the classification of race (Risley 1891: xxiii—xxiv), Paul Topinard for anthropometrical tools (Risley 1891: xxv—xxvi), J.F. McLennan and Henry Maine for marriage customs (Risley 1891: xlii), etc. Two qualifications need to be made here. Despite tracing its lineage to anthropological theories, the ethnological account of caste continued to repeat, as mentioned above, many of the conclusions drawn by the Sanskritists since the late eighteenth century. Secondly, though disputed and disregarded by colonial ethnographers, the indigenous intelligentsia—caste scholars as well as Brahmans—acquired greater reach and salience in the public domain precisely at a juncture when ethnology was laying claim over the intellectual exposition of caste. The two developments were not unrelated. Failing to explain the varied notions of caste shared by people with the help of his ethnological formulations, Risley invited public opinion during the census of 1901 to classify castes; the indigenous intelligentsia supplied caste histories, genealogical tables, and *vyavasthas* (injunctions citing Sanskrit texts) to corroborate community claims.

The themes of ethnological investigation, i.e. the origin and nature of caste, its characteristic markers, its place in the universal history of human societies, etc., confirm that this part of the inquiry was addressed to a European audience. There was little here that dealt with

what was of central concern to the colonial state: the classification of castes. The distinction between academic and state-related dimensions was acknowledged in official correspondence. Regarding the survey of Bengal it had been decided, said Risley, that 'the scientific results arrived at by measurements [of caste-persons] should be kept distinct from purely ethnographic matter, and should be published in a separate volume.' [27] The results of the survey were subsequently published in four volumes, two containing anthropometric measurements and the other two furnishing an ethnographic glossary. Since the anthropometric volumes were of 'purely scientific interest', these were to be printed, Risley wrote, only in limited numbers 'for distribution to anthropological societies and savants in Europe.' [28] Yet, the knowledge that race was the basis of caste would be of little relevance to the colonial state; the ethnographic survey of Bengal was sponsored when statistical compilation of caste data had begun to prove intractable. How far did the ethnology of caste succeed in facilitating the state's programme of classification, and what impact did the exercise have on the idea of caste?

IIIb. Ethnography of Caste

After covering 'the racial divisions' of the people in the chapter on 'Caste, Tribe, and Race' in the census report of 1901, Risley moved on to 'their social divisions, to the Ethnographic data as distinguished from the Ethnological' (Risley 1903: 514). Identifying and classifying castes was what the officials had found difficult from the very inception of the census operations; the situation was no different in 1901. In a statement reminiscent of the remarks of the Secretary of State in 1877, Risley complained that, when asked about his caste, a respondent might give the name of 'an obscure caste . . . a sect . . . a sub-caste . . . an exogamous sept . . . a hypergamous group . . . may describe himself by . . . occupation or . . . the province or tract of country from which he comes' (Risley 1903: 537). So, which among these was a caste? Circumstances demanded clarity on the issue; to count and collate, it was necessary to fix the identifying marker. Hence, in the census report of 1901, there appeared a 'definition' (Risley 1903: 517) of caste. Caste

had several characteristics, Risley wrote; it 'may be defined as a collection of families . . . associated with a specific occupation; claiming common descent.' But more than anything else, caste was 'almost invariably endogamous' (Risley 1903: 517). In Sanskrit texts, Risley had discovered the 'Theory of the "mixed castes"' which spoke against intermarriages between Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra (Risley 1891: xxxvi; also Risley 1903: 546-8). In the ethnological section, he had linked the genesis of caste with the desire for maintaining racial purity through checks on the intermixture of blood. Informed by both Sanskit texts and the theory of race, Risley upheld endogamy as the defining feature of an empirical caste system that replaced the *varna* model.

The proposed definition did not facilitate the enumeration of caste. Endogamy could not be tied to caste; other communities both within and outside India also practised it. Further, a large number of *jatis* enlisted as castes by Risley during his survey of Bengal were not actually endogamous. For example, within the fold of the Kurmi *jati* were present the following groups: Awadhia, Chanaur, Ghamela, Jaiswar, etc. Erroneously called 'sub-castes' by many sociologists, these were the groups that actually practised endogamy: thus, an Awadhia would not marry a Ghamela or a Chanaur (Risley 1891: 530). Going by the academic criterion of endogamy, Awadhia or Chanaur and not Kurmi should be treated as a caste, and yet doing so would have completely violated popular opinion on the subject. Hence, Risley's definition of caste remained inapplicable.

Besides being erroneous, Risley's definition also threw serious doubt on the relationship between race and caste. If race was the basis of caste, why were there so many castes when there were only seven races living in India? Why did groups, ostensibly belonging to the same race, practise endogamy when there was no fear of any admixture of blood? These questions challenged the very sweep of universal science, the very claim of ethnology to explicate ethnography. The theory of race, Risley was convinced, was patently scientific. Crafted by renowned scholars in Europe, its corroborations came from both the universal experience of primitive societies and passages from ancient Sanskrit texts. The cause

for the lack of fit between race and caste therefore had to be found elsewhere; it was located in the flawed nature of the people who did not recognize or remember the 'scientific' reasons that had led to the origin of caste. Caste, standing often as a synonym for India, was imagined differently in the ethnographic section. In Risley's ethnology caste was incorporated in a universal paradigm even if as a primitive social form; it was now represented as an exception to defend the inapplicability of 'scientific' theories.

The 'growth of caste sentiment', Risley explained, was rooted in 'a basis of fact and a superstructure of fiction.' The fact—of racial difference—was 'widespread'; it obtained in other societies too. The fiction that distorted the fact and led to the proliferation of castes was 'peculiar to India' (Risley 1903: 555). The fiction related to the widely shared belief that all those 'who speak a different language . . . worship different gods, eat different food, observe different customs . . . must be so unmistakably alien by blood that intermarriage with them is a thing not to be thought of' (Risley 1903: 556). The influence of fiction, Risley admitted, was noted in 'early societies in all parts of the world'; it had however been 'greatly promoted and stimulated' in this country by 'certain characteristic peculiarities of the Indian intellect' (Risley 1903: 556). The Indian intellect that displayed an 'essentially particularist instinct' (Risley 1903: 522); a 'tendency to *morcellement*' (Risley 1903: 523), was characterized by 'its phenomenal memory, its feeble grasp of . . . fact, its subtle manipulation of impalpable theories, its scanty development of the critical faculty' (Risley 1903: 546, also 556).

The disdain for the Indian intellect extended to what was called the Indian theory of caste. Risley referred to 'the myth of the four castes' (the four-*varna* schema) (Risley 1903: 556) as the source of that 'grotesque scheme of social evolution' known as the 'caste system' (Risley 1903: 547). The myth first appeared 'in its most elaborate form in the tenth chapter of the curious jumble of magic, religion, law, custom, ritual, and metaphysics . . . called the Institutes of Manu' (Risley 1903: 546-7). Significantly, in the ethnological section, while explaining the origin of caste Risley had appraised the Sanskrit texts differently. When extending his universal paradigm across society and

history, he had found illustrations of his ideas of race in these texts: 'the data obtained by the most modern anthropological method agree in the main . . . with the long chain of Indian tradition, beginning with the Vedas' (Risley 1891: xxxiv-xxxv). He went on to assert that 'the standard Indian theory of caste may deserve more respectful consideration than has been accorded to it of late years' (Risley 1891: xxxv). Yet, when confronted with the task of identifying and classifying castes, a situation that seemed to dispute his ethnological findings, Risley blamed the same Sanskrit texts as the source of peoples' irrational beliefs.

As a student of race science, Risley could remain content after attributing the presence of multiple castes to the function of 'fiction'; however, as the Census Commissioner he was still obliged to classify these groups. Hence, he asked the question raised so many times in the past: 'on what principle should they [castes] be arranged?' (Risley 1903: 537). The 'law' of 'inverse ratio' linking the status of a caste with the 'mean relative width' of its nose, that Risley had propounded, was of little help. It failed to explain why the status of castes apparently belonging to the same race, thus having the same nasal index, should differ? In any case, the respective status of castes in any region did not follow the sequence of their nasal index. Failed by his ethnology, Risley finally decided to invite 'public opinion' to undertake a 'classification [of castes] by social precedence' (Risley 1903: 538).

In response to the Census Commissioner's decision, a 'great number of petitions' (Risley 1903: 539) were apparently submitted by various castes laying claim over their self-perceived status. What did Risley discover in these claims? Public opinion, he contended, underlined 'the predominance . . . of the traditional system of four original castes' (Risley 1903: 539). The caste tables from the various provinces showed, he added, that 'the Brahman heads the list. Then come the castes whom popular opinion accepts as the modern representative of the Kshatriyas, and these are followed by . . . the Vaisyas' (Risley 1903: 539).

The limits of Risley's anthropological project were now fully exposed. When reviewing 'the Indian theory of caste', Risley had concluded, like his empirically informed predecessors, that the principle of Manu had

no 'foundation in fact' (Risley 1903: 546). Yet, Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaishya were found suitable as categories for classification precisely at a stage when the claim of science over caste was unequivocal and when empirical investigations extended from social customs to human body. The new-found acceptability of these categories with the Brahman at the top ensued from their trans-local presence and the importance that Risley assigned to the Sanskrit texts to interpret the traditions and beliefs of the people.

The *varna* names thus became the constant constituents of the new pan-Indian caste system. This was not, however, as Dirks (Dirks 2002: 210, 213, 218) would like to believe, an instatement of the 'textual' schema, for several reasons. The schema had already lost its legitimacy: empirical tests had pronounced it non-existent; in Risley's ethnography it exemplified the irrational mindset of a people. Further, Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaishya, when accommodated in the census tables, were shorn off their wider connotations and narrowly interpreted as hierarchical rungs in a ladder-like caste system. Finally, the *varna* format, as I illustrate below, was restricted, redefined, and compromised by the interventions of race science and the compulsions of statistical arrangement.

How did the idea of race influence the classification of castes? Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaishya, Risley believed, belonged to 'the ancient Aryan Commonwealth' (Risley 1891: xxxv). Hence, any claim over these ranks had to be corroborated with reference to Sanskrit texts, the observance of Sanskritic rituals, *vyavastha*s (injunctions) from Brahmans, etc. The Shudras, Risley had speculated, were 'apparently not of pure Aryan descent' and could have been affiliated to the 'Dravidian elements' (Risley 1891: xxxv). Hence, instead of Sanskritic traditions, a host of local customs and practices, i.e. the acceptance of water from them by Brahmans, the prevalence of infant marriage and widow remarriage, the capacity to pollute other castes (Risley 1903: 538), etc., were taken into account by census officials to assess their status. Guided by ethnographic observations, deemed Shudra castes were placed in many provincial reports of the 1901 census in the newly named brackets, redefining in the process their identity and status. Thus, *varna*

names existed alongside the new classificatory terms in the census tables that purportedly laid out the structure of caste society as existing in the different regions.

The classification of castes was also shaped by statistical considerations. One of the statistical moves aimed at facilitating the compilation of data with a significant bearing on questions of identity and status was that of accommodating a number of castes within a single large class. For example, in Bengal all those castes whose names appeared with the suffix 'Brahman' were collectively placed in the census table, irrespective of their mutual differences in status, under the column 'Brahman'. Referring to such discrepancies, Risley wrote: As everyone knows, there are Brahmans and Brahmans [in Bengal], of status varying from Rarhi, who claim to have been imported by Adisura from Kanauj, to the Barna Brahmans . . . from whose hands pure Brahmans will not take water. No attempt has been made to deal with these multifarious distinctions in the Table. It would be a thankless task to attempt to determine the precise degree [of such differences]' (Risley 1903: 540).

To illustrate the divergent influences shaping the classification of castes, I present below an abridged version of the tables that Risley had compiled after drawing upon provincial census reports (Risley 1903: 560-6).

As shown above, the ethnological knowledge denoted by racially demarcated tracts headed the table but was evidently at a remove from the social sphere. The representation of the social sphere bore the telltale signs of contradictory pulls, fracturing it along the lines of conflict and thereby denying it any epistemic unity. In the table, the Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaishya occupied the higher echelons, but these classes could barely contain or represent the entire gamut of public opinion. To accommodate the divergent claims, enumerators were compelled to introduce, through statistical interventions, novel groups of 'castes allied to' the three *varnas.* Further, below the *varnas,* though ostensibly populating the same social space, were communities defined arbitrarily by selecting one or the other aspect of their customs

and practices (e.g. 'castes from whom members of the higher castes can take water', 'castes which pollute even without touching', etc.).

Social Grouping of the Indo-Aryan Tract (Ajmer, Rajputana . . .)	Social Grouping of the Scytho-Dravidian Tract (Bombay, Baroda . . .)	Social Grouping of the Dravidian Tract (Madras, Mysore . . .)	Social Grouping of the Aryo-Dravidian Tract (United Provinces, Bihar)
Class I— Brahmans	I—Brahmans	I—Brahman and allied castes	I—Brahmans and others
Class II—Kshatriyas or allied to Kshatriyas . . .	II—Kshatriyas	II—Kshatriya and allied castes	II —Castes allied to Brahmans . . .
Class III—Vaishyas or trading castes	III—Vaishyas	III—Vaishya and allied castes	III—Kshatriyas
Class IV—Castes from whom members of the higher castes can take *pakki* and water . . .	IV—Shudras	IV—*Sat* or good Shudras . . .	IV—Castes allied to Kshatriyas though their claim is not universally admitted
Class VII—Untouchables	V—Depressed class whose touch is supposed to pollute	VIII—Castes which pollute even without touching	V— Vaishya . . . without

By not insisting on applying the criteria of endogamy, nasal index, etc. to determine the identity or status of castes, this ethnographic practice was able to conceal the incommensurability between ethnological conceptualizations and social perceptions on the subject. Colonial documents carried a sense of familiarity precisely because the people were to a certain extent able to record in these, in the course of the ethnographic surveys, their notions of community. Yet, the caste tables, as argued above, were not entirely a reflection of the existing social arrangements. More importantly, in and through the very format of statistical classification, the ethnographic exercise of the census constituted and corroborated on an empirical plane the idea of a linear caste hierarchy.

A comparison between the representations of caste in the academic and administrative spheres reveals the heterogeneity within what is indiscriminately called colonial knowledge. In his ethnological account, Risley had placed India within the sweep of universal history; the concept of race was the common tool used to map, characterize, and equate societies in Asia and Africa. As a manifestation of racial distinction, caste was interpreted as another primitive social form. The difference between advanced and primitive societies was not considered innate, share as these did the point of departure in their journey on the path of civilization. The point deserves further attention given the widely held opinion (Inden 1990: 60-4, Metcalf 1995: 83-5) that Risley, by linking caste with race, had placed the colonized permanently in an inferior position *vis-à-vis* the colonizer.

When comparing Aryans with Dravidians, Risley placed them hierarchically: the former were credited with a complex social structure and deemed in general to be more advanced (Risley 1903: 506-8, 530; also Risley 1891: l). However, I believe the comparison was more a reflection of the continuing influence of knowledge produced by the Sanskritists since the late eighteenth century. For, in his academic opinion, Risley did not endow races with unequal potential; in fact, he argued against such gradations: 'people with long heads cannot be said to be cleverer or more advanced in culture than people with short heads' (Risley 1903: 497). In any case, the question of comparing races in India with those in Europe and calling the former inferior did not arise. Race, for Risley, was a signifier of primitiveness; contemporary Europe was the abode of civilization, no races were to be found there any more, these having already amalgamated to evolve into nations (Risley 1903: 496). Most importantly, the idea of socio-cultural evolution, on which Risley's ethnology rested, would have prevented him from either permanently hierarchizing races or proposing an inherent difference between the colonizer and the colonized. The assumption that 'there be a single cultural ladder by which man could have climbed unassisted from brute savagery to European civilization' (Stocking 1987: 177) entailed that no race could be denied that route, or singled out as permanently inferior. Risley's ethnological explanation,

therefore, was racial, not racist; both biology/nature and culture were wedded here in what Stocking called, when discussing the formation of anthropology in Britain, 'a Victorian compromise' (Stocking 1987: 272) to chart a single line of evolution.

The image of Indian society was fundamentally altered once the science of race stepped outside the domain of ethnology and started losing its way in a colony of castes. Instead of comparing India with other societies, primitive or advanced, the Census Commissioner, in his ethnographic description, repeatedly referred to the country's alleged peculiarities. The ethnographic caste became the quintessential sign of India's innate irrationality, its otherness *vis-à-vis* Europe. For the evolutionary theory, the categories of the *primitive* and the *irrational* carried contrasting implications: the former was a part of the universal history of progress; the latter, though produced because of the same theory, lay outside. The respective status of tribe and caste in Risley's ethnography illustrates this difference: tribe represented a primitive structure, the original social form associated with any race; caste, though admitted to be more complex, stood in contravention to the universal trajectory that foreclosed for it any prospect of progress. Thus, in Europe, races could evolve into nations as a 'result of unrestricted crossing which . . . fused a number of distinct tribal types into a . . . national type'; in India, because of the functioning of caste, such a 'process of fusion' had long been 'arrested'. Consequently, Risley concluded, there was 'no national type and no nation' in India (Risley 1903: 496).

The mismatch between ethnographic description and ethnological theorization casts a different light on the status of anthropology, a metropolitan discipline, in a colonial situation. There exists another history buried in the image of irrational Indians. This is not a tale about the triumph of European science and the marginalization of the colonized as the 'other'; rather, it tells us how the category of the irrational itself set and signified the limits of universal knowledge. Questioning the singular claim of Western knowledge to represent the colonized, this history intimates us about the presence of two domains, interconnected and yet separate. The first was the sphere of intellectual

formulations where, informed by the premises of academic disciplines and extant theories, scholars processed information culled from colonies to fabricate systemic knowledge of social forms, e.g. caste. Exposed to, though not configured by, the first was the other arena of colonial relations characterized by instances of contestation and convergence involving academic institutions, the colonial state, and communities.

Moving within and between multiple narratives—administrative and statistical, ethnological and ethnographic—caste shows a troubled presence in the pages of the census reports. No exhaustive list of castes could ever be prepared for any province, let alone for the country as a whole; no two reports on the census of India ever matched in the way these classified castes; no inventory of caste was ever compiled without the presiding Census Commissioner expressing misgivings about the whole project. The enumeration of caste continued, given its deemed administrative relevance; however, no sooner had the pan- Indian census started than the state was compelled to try and trim down its engagement with the subject. During the census of 1881 it was decided that only those castes with a minimum numerical strength of 100,000 would be classified; after 1901, following Risley's failure to construct a pan-Indian classificatory table, the practice of classifying castes in the census itself was given up; castes from now onwards were enlisted alphabetically. In 1931, the last general counting of castes took place. Despite these failings, however, the very structure of the census first generated and then sustained the belief that caste was a uniformly definable and empirically verifiable entity.

Conclusion

The *idea* of caste, as conceived in contemporary academic writings and applied in the framing of state policies, was produced in the course of the census operations in colonial India. In the text-based explanations offered by Sanskritists since the late eighteenth century, the Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra were treated as authentic castes; *jatis* enjoyed no distinct conceptual status, the assumption being that these could be subsumed, at least theoretically, within the *varna* order. The

onset of the census operations from the middle of the nineteenth century signalled fundamental changes. Empirical surveys showed the *varna* division to be non-existent; the focus now shifted to the numerous *jatis* populating the social space. The project entailed that these diverse *jatis* be first counted, and then classified within a new pan-Indian template. The obligation was novel and unparalleled. The *jatis,* along with their assumed numerical strength, had been enlisted earlier too; however, these communities stood in such lists as discrete units. The summing up of number in the census, on the other hand, was possible only if the entities counted were made comparable. The compulsion, under the circumstances, was to find features common to the otherwise divergent *jatis*, so that these could be defined and demarcated uniformly. In search of such defining features, the state started investing in ethnographic surveys and was gradually drawn into a nexus, which was not always complementary, with the Western academic complex. Consensus eluded (and still eludes) any definition of caste. Nevertheless, the anthropological investigations carried out alongside the project of statistical classification eventually produced a dogma—of caste being an empirically verifiable entity with a uniform and fixed boundary across the country. Ethnology supplied a singular tale of origin (racial, occupational, etc.), an account of subsequent history, and a set of defining features to caste; ethnography, though not adhering to ethnological formulations when identifying and classifying castes, nevertheless imparted a structure of linear hierarchy to this institution. The pan-Indian architecture of caste included the *varna* names. Though much doubted on empirical grounds, these categories, because of being known beyond a locality, could still serve the state's agenda of classifying the *jatis.* However, in the course of their selective appropriation, Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra were first *empiricalized* and then interpreted as merely denoting ranks. Boundary and hierarchy thus became the two dimensions characterizing the new caste system conceived in the context of counting and classification.

Caste, I believe, cannot be equated either with *varna* or *jati.* The *varna* order is not indeterminate; yet it is not empirically verifiable. The presence of *jatis,* on the other hand, can be observed; however, these

never had a singular and uniform identity in Indian society. Even a small sample from a census report, compiled after an unprecedented application of anthropological theories and tools to unequivocally identify castes, illustrates the point. Some of the names included in the caste table of the report on the census of Bengal in 1901 were the following: Chamar, Halwai, Baniya, Madrasi, Marwari, Manipuri, Burmese, Chinese, Japanese, Bengali, Maratha, Sikh, Baishnab (Bairagi), Buddhist, Munda, Santal, Oraon, Ahir, Kurmi, Barna- sankar, etc. (Gait 1902: 192—266). Tentatively, these communities can be described as professional, regional (both from within and outside the country), linguistic, religious/sectarian, tribal (according to the records of the state), and only locally known groups. The question that must be asked here is the following: what is common between, say, Chamar, Marwari, Munda, and Kurmi that qualifies these to be parts of a list of castes? How can we decide whether 'Baniya' is a caste or not? The only factor that seems to be uniting the names that form the list of castes cited above is that these are seen to belong to different communities. *Jati*, in the first place, then, signifies a community. Caste on the other hand is also imagined as a community but a community of a *particular* type. The particularity of caste is inscribed in the features attributed to it: a uniform boundary marked through the practice of endogamy, a definite and singular hierarchy with perhaps the Brahman at the top and the so-called untouchables at the bottom, a specific set of practices relating to commensality, etc. These particularities do not uniformly apply to the *jatis* and this is why *jati,* as understood in indigenous traditions and society, is not the same as caste.

Caste thus is fundamentally different from both *varna* and *jati*; yet, because of its associations with both *varna* names and *jati* practices struck in the course of the census operations, it has been misconceived as a component of indigenous society. To illustrate this, let us explore what the expression 'Brahman caste', so commonly used in both academic and everyday parlance, could mean. Translated textually, 'Brahman *varna*' cannot denote a group of people physically existing, though that is the idea the word labours to convey. Its empirical rendering as 'Brahman *jati',* on the other hand, would be fallacious—

there has never been nor could there ever be a *jati* in Indian society called Brahman. Kanyakubja Brahman, Maithil Brahman, Namboodiri Brahman, Chitpavan Brahman, etc., are some of the groups regarded in the census reports as Brahman castes. Significantly, in all these names, the word Brahman neither comes alone, nor as a prefix. It is conjoined as a suffix and actually appears as part of the identity of the diverse *jatis.* In similar fashion, the question 'what is caste?', routinely asked in classrooms and beyond, generates an ambiguous sense. Is the question about *varna* or is it about *jati?* These two, I have repeatedly emphasized, are not identical questions and therefore anticipate different answers.

Caste, hence, is an idea of recent origin that emerged by displacing the text-based *varna* order on the one hand and suppressing the multifariousness of *jatis* on the other. Though there was no prior design shaping its production, a pan-Indian caste system in its empirical avatar appeared initially towards the close of the nineteenth century in the documents of the state. Hence, the use of the category of caste in place of *varna* and *jati* in historical explanations of Indian society, and in the framing of policies by the state in contemporary times, can only be misleading. I should perhaps add before I conclude that I am not trying to suggest that there was no hierarchy or discrimination in society before the birth of caste. Both *varna* and *jati,* which have been different and yet interacting parts of indigenous traditions since ancient times, carry their respective notions of hierarchy. In fact, I believe that, by avoiding the linear structure of hierarchy as presented within the caste system, we might better understand the specific constituents of authority that have operated in Indian society.

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10

The Census of India as a Source for the Historical Study of Religion and Caste*

Frank F. Conlon

Historians seeking to understand questions relating to religion and caste in modern India may find the census of India to be an extensive and valuable source. There are many facts and many numbers and, alas, many limitations. Throughout the first century of decennial census reports, 1871—1971, data have been provided on religious identity as returned by individuals. On the other hand, apart from information on the so-called Scheduled Castes and Tribes, most documentation on caste returns was published only during Britain's domination of India. The census volumes of British India and the Indian States dating between 1871 and 1931 abound in statistics and commentary regarding the institution of caste and its various manifestations. These appear not only in the enumeration of the population according to its reported religious and caste identities. There are in addition data arranged with respect to questions of age, sex and geographical distribution, civil condition, education, health, and occupation.

It is not my intention to define narrowly either 'religion' or 'caste' as subjects of historical study, nor to stipulate research strategies for those who would study these topics. This essay will adopt the perspective of

any scholar with *some* conception of 'caste' or 'religion' who might come to the published census record for material to illuminate a particular research problem. It does not directly address the question which has been raised before regarding the extent to which the census enumerations, particularly those of caste, reflected official British perceptions of Indian society rather than any social reality. [1] It is unquestionably true that the enduring interest of the British in caste as a system, which both divided and ranked their Indian subjects, produced an extensive response among those subjects, and also sometimes created new categories by statistical sleight of hand or administration fiat. It must also be admitted that the people of India themselves already had ideas concerning individual and corporate social and religious identities. Conflicts over caste precedence and ranking had a history more ancient than the period of the British census. [2] Still it must be acknowledged that the process of official enquiry and enumeration began to feed back into the society in such a manner as to influence subsequent responses to census enquiries. Professor Jones' essay on 'Religious Identity and the Indian Census' speaks to this issue directly in the critical context of the growth of communal politics in the Punjab. [3] The census operations certainly provided significant orientations for the scholarly study of caste as seen in a large number of former census commissioners who subsequently wrote standard works on the subject: the names of E.J. Kitts, H.H. Risley, H.A. Rose, J.A. Baines, D. Ibbetson, R.E. Enthoven, E. Thurston, E.A.H. Blunt, and J.H. Hutton come to mind.

In this essay I wish to review briefly the range of data which were collected, digested, and presented in census operations which may throw light on caste and religion. In addition, I will consider some of the problems arising in the processes of enquiry and enumeration which influenced the data with which historians must come to terms, turning to my own research experience in working on the history of a caste to illustrate a few of the shortcomings of census materials, intending not a counsel of despair, but invoking a prudent caution.

Religion has found a place in every census of India from 1871 through 1971, although conceptual details and emphasis have varied. The actual enumeration recorded each person's religious identity as given by that person to the census representative. Since enumerators frequently visited heads of households to collect information, it may not be clear that what was recorded was the status given by the individual, but rather what was given for an individual by an elder, or by the enumerator's exercise of observant common-sense.

Religion was normally entered under general rubrics—Hindu, Muslim or Mohammedan, Jew, Christian, Parsi or Zoroastrian, Sikh, Jain, and in some years 'Animist' (to cover tribal religions not definitely tied to one of the great religious traditions). [4] While in some provinces sectarian affiliations were subjects of particular concern, as in the instance of the Virashaivas of Bombay, sectarian data was pursued particularly in the minority religious identities, e.g. Sunni and Shia among Muslims, Shahenshahi and Kadmi among Zoroastrians, and Svetambara and Digambara among Jains. Enumeration of Christians in British India was complicated by racial distinctions between Europeans, Anglo-Indians, and Indian Christians, and further subdivided according to denominations. Sectarian affiliations were last recorded in the 1931 census. A scholar interested in sect figures should be aware that sometimes 'sect' was treated as 'caste' and hence entered, in the case of the Muslims and Parsis at least, under the tabulation of 'caste, tribe, and race' rather than religion. One difficulty in such disaggregated figures lies in the fact that the details and the criteria of such entries varied from province to province and from census to census—reflecting the range of variety within India's population and the particular concerns of her rulers at a given time. Consistency is not one of the enduring virtues of the census of India.

Once individuals had been counted according to their religion, it followed that they might be tabulated with respect to other subjects of enquiry. The aggregated religious data were also tabulated on subjects of sex composition, marital status, literacy and education and, after 1881, occupation. In some instances this system was followed imperfectly. An

overriding official concern about educational standing of Muslims led to a remarkable, and meaningless, enumeration in the Madras 1871 census where tables on education and literacy lumped together Hindus, Jains, and Christians. [5]

As Professor Jones has pointed out in greater detail, the matters of definition were often controversial. In an era of religious proselytizing a decennial census could, like a corporation's yearly report, show 'how they were doing'. Rates of recruitment or loss of members might be easily deduced. Comparative religion as competitive religion could and did become a common theme, particularly where religious identity came to have political significance. The relative positions of Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims in the Punjab or Hindus and Christians in the states ofTravancore and Cochin were vital issues in those regions. The inherently quantitative nature of the census reports served to reinforce public attention on the causes and consequences of numerical growth or decline. More than one writer read the published census data on religion and argued that different growth rates for different religious groups would have dire results in the future. [6]

While such concerns could be engendered by a sense of competition for appropriate shares of the patronage and privilege of an imperial 'broker-government', the census findings were also interpreted to justify selected reform measures. Thus, when the rate of population increase among Hindus appeared to be lower than that among Muslims, it was suggested that this was a symptom of evil social customs of child marriage and infant widowhood, which ought to be abolished. [7]

There is, until the 1961 census, a qualitative problem regarding the religious returns, arising from the enumeration system, in which we know that officials authorized only a limited number of choices of religious identification. Scholars who now approach the census figures must assume that these tabulations represent reasonably accurate representations of the returned religious affiliations of individuals, save that the majority of returns were usually lumped into a general category. Thus the 1921 Bombay census included three categories of Hindu, but two of them, Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj, were some-what

irrelevant, there being counted 21,027,478 Hindu-Brahmanic persons to 1512 Aryas and 4 Brahmos. [8] It also cannot be assumed that all twenty-one million 'Hindu-Brahmanics' were a homogeneous population with closely similar intensities of belief or traditions of practice. Thus, the most successful applications of census analysis in the category of religion may remain those studies which accept the gross figures as having been symbolically or politically important, and which explore correlations of religious identities with data on education or occupation. An example would be the refutation of the classical wisdom concerning the relative deprivation of Muslims in nineteenth-century India. [9]

Caste was regularly enumerated in the census reports of British India from 1871 through 1941. Since 1951 only persons belonging to 'Scheduled Castes' and 'Scheduled Tribes', for whom the Government of India was evolving a policy of protective discrimination, were tabulated. In its day, the caste topic was one of the most controversial. Complexities of caste within each region and across India provided bases of uncertainty. In 1932 an eminent Indian sociologist, G.S. Ghurye, attributed the presence of caste items in the census to British initiative: 'The conclusion is unavoidable that the intellectual curiosity of some of the early officials is mostly responsible for the treatment of caste given to it in the Census, which has become progressively elaborate in each successive Census since 1872.' [10]

However accurate this observation may be, it is worth noting that some British officers were very pessimistic about the possibility of generating accurate census data on caste. W.R. Cornish, who superintended the 1871 Madras census, commented that caste was 'a subject upon which no two divisions or sub-divisions of the people themselves are agreed and upon which European authorities who have paid any attention to it differ hopelessly.' [11] R.E. Enthoven, superintendent of the Bombay census of 1901 admitted that to ignore caste completely 'would be to omit from consideration one of the most interesting aspects of Indian society *as it presents itself through the medium of a Census enumeration*.' [12] Nevertheless he later urged the

discontinuation of caste tabulations. It was extremely costly in terms of hours of preparation, clerical work, and printing. What was worse, it was uncertain. Enthoven argued that the concept of caste 'is so hopelessly vague that our figures are useless' and he urged that 'recording of castes at the Indian censuses should be abandoned' or at least done only every twenty years. [13]

By the early twentieth century, the Ethnographic Survey of India was well under way and the various 'Castes and Tribes' volumes began to appear. It seemed that census enumeration could reduce the ethnographic coverage given to caste. By then, however, the caste reporting had taken on a life of its own in that the Indians themselves now looked with great interest upon what the census tables might tell them of the rate of progress and general condition of their own caste, or of a larger category to which the census assigned them. [14]

Apart from the problem of administrative costs, the census officers faced what may best be described as a glut of data. The 1871—2 censuses, which were carried out without standardized form or simultaneous enumeration, were absolutely swamped with details of caste nomenclature. Attempting to tabulate all responses without editorial intervention led to highly improbable recordings of castes whose total membership appeared to be less than a dozen. Clearly this would not do. From 1881 through 1931, census officers laboured to make the vast array into a somewhat realistic but manageable system. Castes were gradually grouped into 'orders' which could provide a basis for gross aggregation at provincial and all-India levels. In 1881 the proliferation of caste names returned stimulated publication of 'caste index' volumes which sought to systematize the categories and bring order out of chaos. Enumerators were told to be certain that all individuals counted in the census 'fit' into the categories. This led to a reduction in the numbers of castes enumerated. Where 333 castes were listed in the 1881 Punjab census, only 238 appeared by 1911. [15] While some of this reduction was a response simply to an administrative imperative, it was also true that individuals known objectively to be members of one caste often gave in other 'caste' names, apparently

either because of the context of the enumerators' questions, or uncertainty as to what level of specificity the census desired. [16]

The official attempts to create all-India and province-wide categories of castes of equal status and rank stimulated contentious representations by members of would-be upwardly mobile castes, seeking to raise their rank. In some cases the officially created categories were most peculiar indeed. One example would be that of the diverse, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic Madras Presidency. There the otherwise very distinctive Kannada- and Tulu-speaking Bants of South Kanara district were lumped in with Telugu-speaking Naidus of Nellore and Tamil-speaking Kavares of Salem. [17]

In spite of these ethnographic manipulations, the caste sections of the census volumes continued to grow. The 1891 Bombay census devoted full 45.6% (247) of its pages on British territory to caste- related tables. [18] This inflation was partly due to the inclusion of more sophisticated correlations of caste figures with other variables such as education, traditional occupation, infirmities, and marital status. By 1901 there was a marked tendency to give such information only for selected castes, chosen for numerical strength in a given province or division, or because of official perceptions of the group as being influential. 'Representative examples' came to be utilized more and more. Thus scholars who wish to study a particular caste may or may not find full reportage for their selected group even within one province, much less all of India. In Madras, rearrangement of data categories on Brahmans in 1901 meant that small but influential Brahman castes of the west coast were swallowed up in a residual category of 'Brahman—Other' since their mother-tongue was not Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, or Oriya. [19] In 1911 and 1921 distribution of castes by locality was tabulated with selected data on migration for certain castes. In the same years special attention was given to the occupations of selected castes, including separate tables on caste identities of owners and managers of factories. [20]

The census of 1931 was, in effect, the last occasion for extensive reporting of caste data. The 1941 census reports were curtailed drastically because of war-time budget constraints, although caste was enumerated. In Bombay, at least, the provincial government published a small 'Caste Table' to report the census results. The paper could have been saved, for the figures did not betray much accuracy. A tendency among members of Brahmans to return themselves simply by *varna* identity skewed the enumeration of individual groups. The well-known Chitpavan Brahman caste, it appeared, had reduced its population from 113,605 in 1901 to merely 23,812 forty years later. [21] This was a better than zero population growth, but it was only through census vagaries.

The obvious flaws in the caste figures over the decades would have probably led to the demise of the elaborate data collection simply on the grounds that no convincing time series could be established, even had an independent Government of India abolished the coverage on grounds of political and social policy. During the twentieth century, the census reports moved away from extensive ethnographic enquiries. In 1901 and 1911 there were elaborate investigations relating to rank-ordering of castes and the internal governance and dispute-settling mechanisms of caste and tribal groups. Thereafter, other questions seemed more vital. The Indian Industrial Commission of 1916—18 criticized the absence of sufficient economic data from the earlier censuses. In 1921 and thereafter, more energy was given over to enquiries concerning industrial and commercial activities. [22]

This then is the broad outline of the reportage of caste and religion in the census reports of British India. The census volumes represent an extraordinary collection of data. If used cautiously they may prove to be of great utility in many scholarly projects. Nonetheless it should be clear that several general reservations remain. Historians and others have often read and quoted the narrative portions of the census reports, possibly being uncomfortable with quantitative analysis techniques. Of late, however, the rise of 'quantitative history', as it is sometimes called, has brought historians to the statistical meat of the census tables. It bears repeating, however, that the narrative portions of the reports

cannot be ignored. Often they provide vital qualifications or observations on the quantitative data. It is especially sobering to spend some time also consulting the Administrative Report volumes, which usually include valuable information on the background and circumstances of the census operations. It is important that one not only be alerted to the questions which the census officers asked, but also the ways in which the answers were interpreted.

This does not mean that all census data will then become clearly understandable or consistent. Enumeration and tabulation involved many pitfalls in conception and execution. The conception of what was a caste, that is, what was a 'real caste' as opposed to a 'subcaste', constantly agitated the census-taking process. The 1881 Madras 'Caste Index' listed groups under two headings, 'major' and 'minor' so that one finds entries such as 'Brahman, Saraswat'; or 'Brahman, Other', etc. What might alarm the most devout practitioner of the counting arts would be the substantial minority of individuals who would end up being indexed as 'Other, Other.' Indeed, much to the concern of the census superintendent, 47 per cent of the Hindus of Madras could not be classified as to minor subdivisions. [23] In 1891 a group, the Ambiga, were entered as a subcaste of the Kabbera caste and the Kabbera as a subcaste of the Ambiga. The symmetry of this arrangement may actually have reflected status and locality variations, but ten years later it was officially settled that the Kabbera were the main caste, and Ambiga a subcaste designation—at least for census purposes. [24]

On copying out of names from census registers, the enumerators might stumble when two groups had similar names. Taking another example from Madras, 'in Telugu, "Gollan" means a shepherd and in Tamil "Kollan" means a blacksmith. But in Tamil G and K are represented by the same letter so that a Telugu shepherd living in a Tamil district ran every risk of being returned as a blacksmith by caste.' [25] Scholars who are mindful of the uses of manuscript census schedules in American social history might hope to get beyond these confusions by examining the original record. My knowledge on this point is not definitive, but I can report that I have not been able to locate, much less

consult, the registers from which the enumerative census slips of the British Indian reports were compiled. The search should not be given up, however.

Even access to the schedules, if they exist, would not overcome some of the hazards which come across from the fact that most enu-meration was done as honorary labour by persons deputed from other public employments. One man very modestly entered himself on the schedule, writing down the fact that he was 'illiterate'. Another entered particulars for a saint buried in an ancient tomb, pleading in excuse the common belief of the neighbourhood that the saint still lived within his shrine. A third, discovering that a census number had been painted on a village temple, enumerated the deity inside: 'Name, Ganesha; Religion, Hindu; Sex, male; Civil condition, married; Age, about 200 years; Means of subsistence, offerings from villagers; etc.' [26] Such stories punctuated almost all the census reports and may have been included, perhaps as a ritual, to amuse British readers. Still, if they are not false, the stories should remind us of the potentials for variation in returns of a locality because of the quality of personnel in that particular district.

Certain other variations are also found between provinces and between decades, which may complicate or enrich research possibilities. Census reports, gazetteers, and ethnographic survey publications all tended to impinge upon one another. Particularly in respect to caste data, one should note carefully any instance of observations on a given caste being taken up from one publication into another, with or without benefit of citation. Other authorities or sources may also be incorporated, although dating from much earlier times. The Bombay census of 1872 took a lengthy extract on caste out of Arthur Steele, *Law and Custom of Hindoo Castes within the Dekhum Provinces,* which had been published in 1827 and republished without alteration in 1868. [27]

On the other hand, some provincial census programmes added publications of more detailed returns in the form of district handbooks. Most of these are not detailed with reference to caste, although some, such as the 1871 Madras materials, are. They do give statistics for villages and talukas and may prove very useful. However, they did not

receive wide circulation at the time of publication and have not been included in the modern microfiche reproductions of the Census of India. [28]

In this brief essay I have attempted to touch upon some of the characteristic features of Indian census materials regarding caste and religion, pointing out some of the problems which arise in utilizing these data for historical analysis. My point of view is really that of a frustrated scholar who found that his own particular investigations on the history of a caste could not be much advanced through use of official census publications. I must emphasize that many of the shortcomings arose from my having selected a numerically small caste *(jati)* and also from the fact that its members were distributed within several different census territories. [29]

At the early stages of my research I wanted to establish the numerical strength of the Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmans as well as to learn all that I could about their geographical distribution, occupational patterns, and level of education. Since this *jati's* home territory was divided between the Bombay and Madras presidencies in North and South Kanara districts, two sets of census materials had to be consulted at the outset. Problems immediately arose. I learned from other sources that Saraswats were also perceived to be a component of a wider category of related castes known as the Gaud Saraswat Brahmans, and furthermore that they had been migrating extensively in the late nineteenth century. I searched census reports of the Central Provinces, Bengal, Baroda, Cochin, Hyderabad, Central India, and Travancore for reference to isolated migrants, but in vain. The census volumes of those areas concentrated their statistical categories on castes and communities of local standing and importance. Few reports gave details of groups numbering under 100,000 or 10,000. Thus in areas of recent and modest migration, Saraswat residents would only be incorporated in one of those vague 'others' categories. And, after 1901, as noted above, even South Kanara's figures grew vague when the Madras reports moved to tabulating Brahmans according to major language. The Konkan-speaking Saraswats got returned variously as 'Others' because Konkani

was their mother-tongue, or as ‘Kannada’ because most of them were literate in that language.

Another difficulty arose in the provincial-centredness of census reports. I could learn how many persons of all castes and communities had migrated into Bombay city or any Bombay district from each and every other district of Bombay. However, South Kanara migrants to North Kanara or to Bombay were treated simply as part of a single Madras Presidency category. After 1901, the Bombay reports did include some selective data on caste migrations from selected districts outside the Bombay Presidency, but there was no consistency nor continuity from one decade to the next.

Only within the census reports of Bombay Presidency, but not Bombay city, during the decades 1901 to 1931, could I find usable data for analysis of educational and occupational status. This small breakthrough was complicated, however, by the fact, which I came to slowly apprehend, that it was in this very period that some Saraswats and their Gaud Saraswat cousins were promoting a caste unification movement which stressed a common caste-category name. While it became possible to measure some of the overall characteristics of persons returning themselves, in certain districts, as Gaud Saraswat Brahmans, it did not follow that the numbers included all Saraswats, since participation in the unification movement had been a point of social controversy within the caste. [30] Once more the census documentations left important gaps in my analysis.

Perhaps my frustration mirrored an earlier dissatisfaction among intelligent members of the Saraswat caste itself, for they made a series of efforts to carry out a caste census of their own, commencing in 1896 and culminating in a comprehensive coverage in 1932. [31] While knowledge of this sort had been of little importance when most member of the caste were still in rustic North or South Kanara, the migration of Saraswat into new territories and urban centres created a need to preserve the community’s links.

Ultimately it was possible for me only to utilize the official decennial census reports as a means toward developing hypotheses about demographic, economic, or intellectual trends among those persons who returned themselves as Saraswat Brahman in the localities where the census took note of the identity. It was a frustrating experience, but a useful initiation into coming to terms with the complexities of the census reports of British India.

My own misadventures with the Census of India ought not obscure the fact that this massive collection of qualitative and quantitative data can be extensively and successfully exploited for historical research. It only must be stipulated that it cannot be assumed that the census will clarify questions about religion and caste simply because there are lots of tables dealing with aspects of those topics. Nor should the mere existence of those neat rows of numbers confer upon the researcher any satisfying sense of certainty either in terms of accuracy of enumeration or of representation. Within any individual decennial census, particularly within a single province, I think the chances of consistency and coherence of data are much higher, but construction of comparative time series between decades and provinces may prove a hopeless task in some instances. The fact that in my own programme of research on a single caste's history I experienced great frustration need not lead to an assumption that other single-caste studies could not be done. Certain studies based on the census figures alone could be carried out with a high level of statistical manipulation and analysis, but prudence should be exercised in assuming that the results have a higher reality because of their quantitative derivation. Imagination and caution must go hand in hand as any historian of modern India approaches the census reports in an effort to become a 'scholar who counts'.

11

The Census, Social Structure, and Objectification in South Asia*

BERNARD S. COHN

The bulk of social and cultural anthropological fieldwork has been done in colonial settings. In a very real way the subject matter of anthropology has been the study of the colonized. A category of 'colonized people' is imprecise and difficult to specify, but it would in my terms include groups such as the American Indians and Africans transplanted to the New World, people who were physically uprooted and placed in new locations and relocated in newly created stratification systems, to the peoples of much of Africa, South and South East Asia—in which the effects of colonial rule have been more indirect and are mainly felt through political and economic innovations growing out of the colonial rulers' aim to control products of colonized labour rather than the labour itself. Anthropologists, when they have been concerned with the process of colonialism, have emphasized the political and the economic effects of alien rule and have mainly described structural changes in the affected societies. Thus far, there has been little attention paid in the study of colonialism to the culture of the colonized.

In use, the concept 'culture' in its more recent meanings, to 'denote an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a

system of inherited conceptions expressed in forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life' [1] —rather than older definitions of culture, which are broader and tend to emphasize the idea of culture as a 'way of life' encompassing social as well as cultural systems—is more common. In the terms I am using here, culture equals symbol systems.

Historians in general have been much more sensitive than have anthropologists to the problem of changing culture in colonial societies. Historians of India see cultural change in standard terms of intellectual history. They have been concerned, if I may use a slightly out of date term, with the 'impact' of Western thought on Indian culture. Ten years ago this was viewed as a replacement of Indian ideas, concepts, and symbols by Western ones. Students of recent India talked about Westernization, by which they meant the results of the borrowing by the Indian elite of Western ideas about 'attitudes towards life'. The 'Bengal Renaissance' can be taken as an example of the process of Westernization. The idea of a 'Renaissance' is clearly Western in origin; it draws directly on Western historical experience as well as on the Western form of historical thinking, which is linear, in which it was possible for Humanists to see the past in relation to themselves and to think of a process by which the past is redefined and purified and selected aspects of it utilized for models or prescriptions for behaviour in the present. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European scholars developed the idea of the Renaissance to denote a particular period in Western history and the development of a distinctive culture associated with that period. In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries both indigenous Asian scholars and intellectuals as well as some Western historians viewed the development of intellectual stances among groups in Chinese, Indian, and Islamic societies as the same kind of experience that Western Europe went through in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. There has been an attempt to broaden the concept of 'Renaissance' to cover the movement of cultural change brought about by the contact of Asian societies with the ideas and forms of thought developed in Western Europe. I would list the following as characteristic of these intellectual trends in Asian societies.

That these societies were living in 'a new era', a dawn, a rebirth of culture, is well conveyed by Amiya Charan Banerji.

> Superstition and cruel customs played havoc in Hindu society. The burning of widows in those days was a common practice. The poor meekly submitted to the tyrannies of the rich. The woman suffered terribly from many unjust and oppressive customs. She was completely dominated by man. Modern science had not yet begun to dispel ignorance, superstition, and blind faith. The Hindu orthodoxy formed almost an immovable barrier on the path leading to progress and development. This was the set-up of the Hindu society specially in Bengal when Rammohan Roy appeared on the scene. His was the mighty genius who tore to pieces the arguments advanced by orthodox pundits in support of idolatrous and superstitious practice and of the cruel custom of *Satidaha*. In religion, in education, and in the political sphere he gave the start to national awakening about one hundred and fifty years ago. He was indeed the father of the Indian Renaissance. During the period of the Renaissance, a galaxy of inspired religious leaders, great social reformers, noble patriots, eminent political thinkers, and mighty literary geniuses appeared in India and especially in Bengal. [2]

The quotation from Banerji also highlights another major theme of cultural renaissances, certainly as typical of the Bengal case, and that is the need for purification of religious thought and practice. The Bengali intellectuals of the nineteenth century sensed that there was a quintessential Hinduism, which over the centuries had become encrusted with superstition and other unhealthy accretions.

A third theme related to the need to 'purify' Hinduism was to make it consonant with European ideas of rationality, empiricism, monotheism, and individuality. Many Bengalis by the middle of the nineteenth century saw the development of ambivalence, that they couldn't totally integrate a purified Hinduism with Western rationality. On the one hand this led to what was perceived as hypocrisy—or, as one writer put it, 'There are those who believe one way and practice in another, who

celebrate the *puja* in the morning and dine of veal cutlet and sausage in the evening.' [3]

This ambivalence, this view of the modern Indian between East and West, becomes a central theme in the Renaissance view of its own culture and comes down to the recent past in the writings of men like Jawaharlal Nehru:

> I have become a queer mixture of the East and the West, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere. Perhaps my thoughts and approach to life are more akin to what is called Western than Eastern, but India clings to me, as she does to all her children, in innumerable ways; and behind me lie, somewhere in the subconscious, racial memories of a hundred, or whatever the number may be, generations of Brahmans. I cannot get rid of either that past inheritance or my recent acquisitions. They are both part of me, and, though they help me in both the East and the West, they also create in me a feeling of spiritual loneliness not only in public activities but in life itself. I am a stranger and alien in the West. I cannot be of it. But in my own country also, sometimes, I have an exile's feeling. [4]

This theme of ambivalence was put in even more stark and personal terms by Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, a leader of the Brahmo Samaj, a religious reform movement, in 1879, after he had heard Ramakrishna, a 'traditional' rustic mystic and divine:

> What is there common between him and me? I, a Europeanized, civilized, self-centred, semi-sceptical, so-called educated, reasoner, and he, a poor, illiterate, shrunken, unpolished, diseased, half-idolatrous friendless Hindu devotee? I, who have listened to Disraeli and Fawcett, Stanley and Max Muller, and a whole host of European scholars and divines; I, who am an ardent disciple and follower of Christ, a friend and admirer of liberal- minded missionaries and preachers, a devoted adherent and worker of the rationalistic Brahmo Samaj—why should I be spellbound to hear him? [5]

The ambivalence was tied with a discovery or rediscovery of the past. This would seem to be almost necessary in terms of the ambivalence

created by a view of the culture of the present as being one that the intellectuals could not fully accept since they had incorporated an European view into their own. Following our Bengal example, if the intellectuals accepted the European-based view of their present, which emphasized the aberrations of the society and its religious system, then they would have to reject their own culture or be hypocrites. However, if they could find in their past a 'golden age' and time when their own religion and society were superior, then they could argue that Indian civilization at a point in the past was the equal ofWestern society and that the rebirth inherent in the idea of a Renaissance was a rebirth of their own traditions and not only a borrowing from the West. It became imperative for nineteenth- and twentieth-century Indians to develop a knowledge of their own past, the form of which might be couched in Western historical terms but the intent of which was often to provide a rationale to counter the pressure of Western cultural imperialism. [6]

In the twentieth century, with the development of nationalism, there was a concerted effort on the part of both political and cultural leaders to use historical figures, movements, and symbols derived from the historical record of India as a means of relating the struggle against the British to the Indian past. In western India the efforts of B.G. Tilak and his followers to revive the interest of Maharashtrians in Sivaji, [7] Bankim Chandra Chatterji's use of historical themes in his novels, particularly in *Anandamath*, [8] Savarkar's *First War of Indian Independence*, [9] which viewed what the British historians call the Indian Mutiny of 1857-9 as the first Indian struggle for freedom against the British: all of these can be seen as part of a process by which Indians could view their own history, identify with it, and use it in the development not only of political nationalism but in order to try to define their own identity. The phenomenon, which I have been illustrating, has its counterpart in most parts of the world. [10]

To speak only of a Western impact or of modernization, to see the process of cultural change and the development of new cultural identities as a kind of byproduct of an historical experience whose major thrust has been political and economic, is to miss some of the

significance of what has happened. Not only have the colonial peoples begun to think of themselves in different terms, not only are they changing the content of their culture, but the way that they think about their culture has changed as well. The Indian intellectuals of Bengal in the nineteenth century and then the whole Western-educated class of Indians in the twentieth century have objectified their culture. They in some sense have made it into a 'thing'; they can stand back and look at themselves, their ideas, their symbols and culture and see it as an entity. What had previously been embedded in a whole matrix of custom, ritual, religious symbol, a textually transmitted tradition, has now become something different. What had been unconscious now to some extent becomes conscious. Aspects of the tradition can be selected, polished, and reformulated for conscious ends. Gandhi saw *ahimsa* (non-violence) as quintessentially Indian and shaped it into an effective political weapon. B.G. Tilak and Aurobindo Ghose, early nationalists, selected from Hindu traditions concepts and ideals which could be worked into a new kind of national religious ideology. They reinterpreted the Bhagavad Gita into what has become for many modern Indians an authoritative expression of Hindu thought. They argued it was the Hindu's *dharma* to further nationalism; by implication they argued, on the basis of their interpretation of the Gita, that violence was justified in a righteous cause and that nationalism was a religiously given righteous cause. Gandhi also contributed to the 'objectification' of the message of the Gita and the process by which the Gita is now looked upon as a kind of Hindu bible, as the single most authoritative expression of Hinduism. [11]

In the current analysis of symbol systems by anthropologists, the effort is to see underlying structures, to seek coherence in the statements made by informants, to seek the relationship of cultural categories as expressed in myth and rituals, and often to put together cultural expressions which on the surface appear to be contradictory. In working with informants or in the analysis of texts of particular myths or folktales, or in records of particular rituals, the anthropologist usually does not have the materials to study directly how the particular symbols or symbol clusters or cultural categories came to be associated,

how they are maintained and how they change. Explanations, when they are made in this form of analysis, may call upon explanations which are rooted in some idea of human nature or are related to particular issues of societies, or they are seen as based on psychological differences.

The historian of ideas of literate societies can trace symbols through time but frequently has difficulty in relating the changes in symbol systems directly to change in the society, or if he can he frequently is not interested in doing so and treats ideas and their symbolic expression as *sui generis*. Historians frequently talk of the 'climate of opinion', the zeitgeist, the 'feeling of an age' or the weltanschauung, but infrequently tell us how they are established, maintained, and transmitted. [12] In the study of India there are a number of obvious contexts to probe if one is interested in the process of objectification and in the process of the reformulation of Indian culture in the recent past. Educational institutions have attracted the attention of historians, [13] also Western-style scholarship, [14] the development of printing and literary societies, [15] the studies of the recent history of modern Indian languages, [16] and studies of the courts and the legal system have contributed to the process of objectification. [17]

Central to the process of objectification have been the hundreds of situations that Indians over the past two hundred years have experienced in which precedents of action, in which rights to property, their social relations, their rituals, were called into question or had to be explained. It was the act of questioning the need for explanation to themselves or to the British which lies at the heart of the process. As a means of exploring the process of objectification, as a case study of how the process developed, I will briefly describe the structure and function of the Indian census. I think the census makes a good case study of the process for several reasons. First, it touched practically everyone in India. It asked questions about major aspects of Indian life, family, religion, language, literacy, caste, occupation, marriage, even of disease and infirmities. Through the asking of questions and the compiling of information in categories which the British rulers could utilize for

governing, it provided an arena for Indians to ask questions about themselves, and Indians utilized the fact that the British census commissioners tried to order tables on caste in terms of social precedence. [18]

The Pre-History of the Census 1780—1820

The history of the Indian census must be seen in the total context of the efforts of the British colonial government to collect systematic information about many aspects of Indian society and economy. The first problem the British faced was the development of information on the collection of revenue with the acquisition of the right to collect revenues from some of the territories in Bengal. In 1769 the British appointed fifteen revenue supervisors for the districts of Bengal and Bihar from which they had the right to collect revenue. The supervisors' task was to supervise Indian tax officials who were to do the actual work. Henry Verelst, Governor of Bengal, drew up instructions for the supervisors, which among other things stressed the necessity for the collection of information on the history of the districts, and on the history of leading families and their customs as these affected their positions in relation to landholding. The supervisors were to obtain complete rent rolls for the districts based upon direct collection of information from local zamindars and revenue officials. They were also to report on the agricultural and craft production of the districts. [19]

It appears that the instructions for the collection of information were never systematically carried out by the supervisors but these instructions were taken by nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars as the symbolic founding of activities that eventually developed into the various Gazetteer series published in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. [20] Coincident with the attempt to develop systematic information centred on the nature of landholding, revenue assessments, and crude information on trade and agriculture—topographic surveying, exploration, and the drawing of accurate maps began to develop rapidly. [21]

In the early decades of the nineteenth century special inquiries usually concerned with the functioning of the administration of justice or revenue were directed to be undertaken either by the Court of Directors, by the Board of Control in London, or by the Governor General in India. Typical of such an effort was the request of the Earl of Moira (Governor General of India, 1812—23) late in 1814 to district judges directed to the question of the functioning of the courts but incidentally calling for information on the population of their districts and brief descriptions of the economy and society of the districts. [22] With the acquisition of new territories through annexation or military conquest, individual officers of the Company attempted to summarize pre-existing records which might yield quantitative information of a social and economic sort; they combined with this the qualitative assessments of population, land area, agricultural and craft production, and discussion of history and government, often based on reports of subordinate officials. [23]

Characteristically, these kinds of materials were heavily weighted toward political history, with particular emphasis on the reigning royal houses and to questions affecting the assessment and collection of land revenue. Fortunately though, they contain either in separate sections or in passing descriptions of the main castes and tribes in the region, which are larded with normative judgements about their qualities. Estimates of population are frequently given but it is hard to find the basis on which these estimates are made. For Maratha territories, the estimates seem to have been developed out of the revenue records rather than by direct census enumeration. [24]

The first full-scale effort to produce a Gazetteer of India was that of Walter Hamilton, *A Geographical, Statistical, and Historical Description of Hindostan and the Adjacent Countries,* 2 vols, London, 1820. Hamilton's aim was to 'reduce the Geography of Hindostan to a more systematic form than had yet been attempted . . . and at the same time to present a description of its internal economy.' Hamilton organized his Gazetteer in major territorial blocks, largely following the Mughul provinces and districts. The Gazetteer was based on what published

materials there were; for geographical information his main source was Major James Rennel's *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan,* which was published in 1793, on articles which had appeared in *Asiatic Researches,* in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, and on manuscript materials found in the India Board. The usefulness of Hamilton's Gazetteer was in the location of many places relatively accurately in terms of latitude and longitude, in brief historical sketches of the principal states and towns, in mileages between locations, and in the assembling of what population estimates existed at the time.

Early Attempts at Population Estimates and the Taking of Censuses 1820—70

Walter Hamilton in his Gazetteer estimated the population of India at 123 million. Hamilton was not too clear on what this estimate was based and refers in a general way to reports of the India Board. Apparently these were partially made up of responses in 1801 submitted by collectors to the Board of Revenue for Bengal, as well as of the work of Buchanan. These cover the Presidency of Bengal and it is not clear how he arrived at figures for the rest of India. [25]

As part of the materials submitted to the House of Commons in connection with the investigation carried on at the time of Charter renewal in 1831-2, Thomas Fisher, searcher of the Record at the East India House, provided a figure of 89 million for the population of British India. His figures were based on reports for Lower and Upper Bengal submitted in 1822 and 1826 by the superintendents of police. The method used for the Upper Provinces was based on the enumeration of villages and the multiplication of that figure by the average populations for villages. [26] Mountstuart Elphinstone, using these figures and then estimating the population of territories not reported on by Fisher, came up with a figure of 140 million. [27]

In the first decades of the nineteenth century there were efforts made to conduct censuses of various Indian cities. One of the earliest reported censuses was done of Banaras in 1801 by Zulficar Ali Khan,

kotwal of the city of Banaras, done at the request of the judges of the Appeal Court. He based his estimate on the purported number of houses which he counted by type, whether stone or mud, and the number of storeys. He then arrived at an average figure for each type of dwelling and came up with the grand total of 582,000. [28] It is this figure on which Hamilton based his estimate of 600,000 in his Gazetteer in 1820. The figure of 600,000 and above continued to be used for the population of Banaras in the middle of the nineteenth century. [29]

It is clear that this was a gross overestimate on the part of Zulficar Khan, who according to James Prinsep (who carried out a census of Banaras in 1827—8) used the high figure to enhance the importance of his position as kotwal. Prinsep was Mint Master in Banaras and secretary of the short-lived Committee on Local Improvements in Banaras. It was in connection with this latter job that Prinsep carried out his census. He adopted two methods. The first was to have interviewed the *chaudhuris* of all of the castes in Banaras, and when Prinsep couldn't determine such an office for a caste he undertook direct investigation. This census gave him a figure of 152,613. His second method was based on as accurate a listing of all the houses in Banaras as he considered possible, which he made up from a register being put together for the levying of a tax for the cleaning and repair of streets and drains. Prinsep then classified the houses as to size and type, got average figures for each type on a sample basis, and estimated the population of Banaras at 181,482. He added to this some people living in the suburbs and estimated the population at approximately 200,000. [30] Censuses done later in the nineteenth century indicate that Prinsep's figures were perhaps too high and that the lower figure of 152,000 was more nearly correct. [31]

There is reason to believe that not only was the population of Banaras consistently overestimated in the first half of the nineteenth century, but that of other cities as well. Given the methods used it is easy to see why the population may have been overestimated. The reasons why the overestimations were believed is a more interesting question. I think the reasons lie in the perceptions of the cities by Europeans. In the early

nineteenth century, as in the twentieth century, Indian towns and cities, particularly the *chauks* and bazaars, the commercial areas, give a sense of huge crowds. This sense comes from the layout of the towns and cities, and from the architecture. Town plans in the nineteenth century were featured by many narrow lanes with even narrower paths leading off them. In cities such as Banaras there were large brick and stone tenements which often seemed to the observer to be built without plan and to contain enormous numbers of people. Most European travellers described Banaras in terms of large numbers of people, crowded conditions, noise, and tumult.

> The streets are only a few feet broad, confined with high buildings on each side, so that the sun can hardly penetrate to the bottom of the lanes. [32]

> Of the population of Benares, I am unable even to conjecture: the streets are so narrow and the buildings crowded to such a degree that you can have no conception of the number of people they contain. [33]

> The city of Benares is certainly the richest, as well as probably the most populous in India . . . the vast population, the crowds of beggars and pilgrims. [34]

> There are no wide streets in Benares, or large thoroughfares leading down to the river, but numerous narrow and intricate lanes. [35]

In addition to the estimates made in the 1820s for the total population of India, the British continued in the 1830s and 1840s to try to determine the population of India. Most of the efforts were based upon the revenue surveys and were a byproduct of attempts to map villages and lands. The Court of Directors called for a more accurate count to be made in 1846 as they felt that the figure 32 million for Upper India (North West Provinces) was much too high and they couldn't believe that the population was close to 500 persons per square mile. [36]

The district officers in the North Western Provinces were instructed to obtain population figures from revenue surveys, from statements in reports on education, from settlement reports, and from other surveys carried out in recent years. The figures for villages and *tahsils* were to be tested against information supplied by *chaukidars* and *patwaris.* The population estimate for districts was to be based on a listing of the villages and the estimate of the number of houses in each village. The village officials were to provide the house counts by each caste. Average figures for the number of persons in a house by caste were to be computed. John Thornton, who was secretary to the LieutenantGovernor, was aware that there might be a difference in the number of persons in a house depending on the caste. He reasoned that the upper-caste houses would have more people than the lower-caste households. In addition to a gross figure for each village in a district and gross district figures, an effort was made to determine how many people were agriculturalists. An agriculturalist was to be defined as anyone who derived his subsistence in whole or in part from the land, whether in wages or in rent, even though he might have other sources of income. This may not be the start of the conceptual problems which the census of India was to have and continues to have with the question of what is an agriculturalist, what is a labourer, what is a primary and what a secondary occupation, and all the various knotty questions of occupational categories in the Indian census. But it can be seen that from the earliest attempts there were conceptual problems built into the economic categories of the census. [37]

We can also see the beginnings of problems in developing categories adequate to cover aspects of Indian social structure. In the report of Shakespear, the instruction to the collectors regarding the question of house, household and family was:

> A house or family must be defined according to its local signification; perhaps it may generally be defined as a family living together, inhabiting a distinct part of a tenement or the whole of one or more tenements, in the same enclosure. [38]

As could be predicted with such a vague definition, collectors were left to define what a house or family was in their own terms. Two operational definitions of family seem to have been used. One was based on multiple criteria of common expenditure, [39] and the other was based on eating from a common hearth. [40] Those involved in this early effort at a census soon found difficulties even with questions of age, not only the difficulties of getting absolute age but also of trying to get estimates of the number of adults and the number of children. At what age was a young male considered to be a child and at what age was he to be considered an adult? This question was left to individual collectors and A.A. Roberts in the Delhi district decided as follows: 'It was ruled that males above 12 should be considered men, and under that age as boys; and females above 10 should be enumerated as women and under that age as girls.' Notwithstanding the selection of these early ages, the tendency of the people was to consider still younger persons as men and women. [41] Roberts also found problems in getting estimates of the number of females, as the Hindus consistently underestimated the number. This was a problem which Prinsep also found in Banaras when he questioned chaudhuris of the castes as to their numbers, since women were not reported.

Within five years of the publication of the census of 1847 orders were given that another census be carried out because of the inaccuracies of the previous census. This census was to be carried out by an actual enumeration of the total population of the North West Provinces and was to be carried out on the same day, 1 January 1853. [42] This census was to record occupation as well as the number of people, households, and the number of villages. The actual enumeration was to be carried out by patwaris assisted by the village police, and in towns and cities by the heads of wards. In rural areas the work of the patwaris was to be supervised by the tahsildars, and that of the tahsildars by the collectors. There was an effort to make specific the definition of family—'Those who live together or who cook their food at the same hearth.' [43] The problem of what an agriculturalist was not much advanced—'Those families are to be shown as agricultural of whom the head derives the

whole or any part of his subsistence from the possession or the cultivation of land.' [44]

Christian, in his summary of the findings, pointed to the high density of the population, which was 420 to the square mile for the whole of the North Western Provinces, and reached over 600 persons per square mile in the eastern part of the province. He tried to disarm the critics in London—who had used such density figures as an indication of the inaccuracies of previous counts—by pointing out that this would in no way seem strange to those familiar with Indian conditions, and said that if anything there was probably an underestimation rather than an overestimation in the population figures. [45]

Christian was not satisfied with the way in which agriculturalists were counted. He felt too broad a construction was given to the term 'agriculturalist'. His solution to the difficulty was to recommend that in future censuses the caste and occupation of the head of each family be recorded. He felt that a combined criteria of caste and occupation was the only way in which the relative strength of the agricultural and non-agricultural classes could be accurately ascertained.

The confusion amongst the European observers of caste and occupation in the early nineteenth century was quite widespread and can easily be seen in the town and district censuses which the Bhattacharyas reprint in their *Report on the Population Estimates of India 1820—1830*. There was a tendency to report the numbers in a particular caste as if all members of the caste followed the culturally assumed occupation, even though it was frequently known that not all Brahmans worked as priests and not all Rajputs were warriors and landlords. Some observers, such as Walters, who did a census of Dacca in 1830, tried to give both caste membership and, when the members of the caste followed more than one occupation, to give a breakdown by household of the occupations they followed. Walters, though, clearly had difficulties in deciding what a caste was, since Sudras are listed as a caste as well as Banias. [46]

The Development of the Modern Census 1871-1901

A full census of India was to have been attempted in 1861 but because of the dislocations caused by the suppression of the rebellion of 1857—9 and of the sensitivity which the British had developed to what, at least in North India, might be constructed as undue interference in the life of the people, the census was postponed until 1871—2. A census of most of the provinces and princely states was carried out in 1871 and 1872, but such imperfections, both in administration and in conception, developed that not much reliance was put in the census at the time. There seems to have been very little effort made to make the provincial censuses comparable to each other. The rules for recording the heads of households differed from province to province, certain categories of information, for example on education and literacy, were not collected in all provinces and there was much evidence of little co-operation from the population because of the fears that the carrying out of the census was for tax purposes. [47]

British census officials always included in their reports accounts of rumours which were purported to circulate among the Indian population. In Oude in 1869 it was rumoured that one male from each family or every fourth man was to be taken as a recruit for the army, or as a labourer on the roads, or as an emigrant. It was also rumoured that the women were wanted for the European soldiers. One report circulated that England had become so hot that the Queen desired that two virgins might be sent from each village to fan her day and night, and the census was merely a subterfuge for the carrying out of the Queen's orders. [48]

In each of the provinces there were individual difficulties, often because of the way in which records were kept or in the staffing of the census operations. For example, for twenty years starting with the census of 1871—2, there were difficulties in Bengal in getting an accurate list of villages or, for that matter, even defining what a village was. As Bengal was permanently settled, village lists, maps, and settlement records were not available and there was not the large staff at the district and tahsil or taluk level which characterized non-permanently settled areas.

In Bengal the first step was to try to draw up an accurate list of survey *mauzas* which would provide the basic geographic unit on which the census would be carried out. It was found that the list which the police kept of villages on which the police circles (*thanas*) were based was totally inaccurate for census purposes because the boundaries of the villages were vague and the list was not up-to-date in terms of even the presence or absence of some villages. H. Beverly, who was Census Commissioner for Bengal in 1871—2, felt that the only way an accurate list of villages could be obtained was by sending a responsible official to each revenue village to check the boundaries and particulars of that village. His instructions, which were duly forwarded to the revenue commissioners throughout Bengal, brought an immediate howl of response that such a check could not be carried out without seriously interfering with their regular work. If a special staff were appointed, it was estimated that 350 officials would have to be appointed for a period of four months at a cost of 70,000 rupees to visit every village in Bengal, exclusive of Bihar. [49]

In the 1881 census of Bengal, it was decided to use a list which was in the process of being prepared by the Boundary Commissioner, who was an officer of the Revenue Survey. The office had been created in 1853 to settle all boundaries of revenue and judicial units and to prepare an accurate list of mauzas (revenue) villages in each magistrate's jurisdiction. This work was finished in time for the 1881 census and provided the basis for drawing up village lists for the census. In 1891, what was termed the residential village was the basis for determining census units. In Bihar it turned out that the mauza designation was widely enough known that the residential village and revenue village coincided. In Bengal proper and in Orissa this turned out not to be the case and the distinction between hamlet and village and even the boundaries of dispersed villages were not clear to the residents and to the census enumerators. This led to a situation in which, in the Cuttack district in Orissa, the census recorded 12,841 villages in 1881, 5429 in 1891, and 6347 in 1901. [50]

Also related to the problem of the location of a village was the problem that arose of trying to distinguish villages from towns. In the 1872 census a town was distinguished from a village arbitrarily by defining any place with more than 5000 people in it as a town. The purpose of making distinctions, according to J.A. Bourdillon, Deputy Superintendent of Census Operations for Bengal in 1881, was to contrast the occupational structure of rural and urban people and 'to show how their separate modes of life affect their ages and civil conditions, and to display the sources from which our urban population is drawn.' [51] Bourdillon didn't feel that a simple size criterion was sufficient because places smaller than 5000 people could have the social characteristics of a town, and places over 5000 people could be based entirely on agriculture and not have any characteristics of towns. The decision was to use an administrative definition of a town as those places notified under the Municipalities Act of 1876 as well as any place with more than 5000 people.

The experience which the census directors had in Bengal with the location and definition of a village and town can be repeated for almost every province in India and for almost every question asked on the census.

Perhaps the most complex question for the census takers arose over the question of caste. Questions about caste also hold the most interest today for anthropologists and many other social scientists. G.S. Ghurye, as well as succeeding students of Indian society, saw the census itself as having effects on the caste system.

> The conclusion is unavoidable that the intellectual curiosity of some of the early officials is mostly responsible for the treatment of caste given in the census, which has been progressively elaborate in each successive census since 1872. The total result has been as we have seen, a livening up of the caste-spirit. [52]

> It might be said that the historical role which Indian rulers had played as the final arbiters of the ranking of castes within their jurisdiction, including the ability to promote as well as demote

> castes, was now transferred by the people to the new rulers; and the ranks accorded to castes in census reports became the equivalent of traditional copper-plate grants declaring the status, rank and privileges of a particular caste or castes. [53]

Srinivas and Ghurye raise two very important questions. Why did the British officials record the caste of individuals? Was it curiosity or was it part of the design on the part of the British, as some nationalist Indians believed, 'to keep alive, if not to exacerbate, the numerous divisions already present in Indian society.' [54] The second order of questions relates to the effects of census operations on the consciousness of caste and the use of the census for validation of claims to new status within the caste system. To these two complicated and important questions a third may be added—what influence did the census operations have on theoretical views which both administrators and social scientists developed about the Indian social system? Most of the basic treatises on the Indian caste system written during the period 1880 to 1950 were written by men who had important positions either as census commissioners for all of India or for a province. Among these were A. Baines, E.A.H. Blunt, R.E. Enthoven, B.S. Guha, T.C. Hodson, J.H. Hutton, D. Ibbetson, E.J. Kitts, L.S.S. O'Malley, H.H. Risley, H.A. Rose, R.V. Russell, and E. Thurston. Of important works written on caste during this period only William Crooke, C. Bougle, G.S. Ghurye, A.M. Hocart, J.C. Nesfield, and E. Senart did not have positions important in census operations. This latter group of authors as well as many others drew heavily for illustration and analysis on the materials generated by the census of India. It would not be an exaggeration to say that down until 1950 scholars' and scientists' views on the nature, structure, and functioning of the Indian caste system were shaped mainly by the data and conceptions growing out of the census operations. The census was the necessary prerequisite both for the Imperial Gazetteer and for the Tribes and Castes series. Much of the basic scholarly apparatus, which continues to be used today for both administrative and scholarly activity, is founded on the work done on caste and related subjects as part of the census operations.

The official rationale for the taking of the census was based on administrative necessity. Beverly argued in 1872 that without precise information 'regarding the number of the people, there was felt to be a sense of inconvenience in the administration of Bengal. Without information on this head, the basis is wanting on which to found accurate opinions on such important matters as the growth and rate of increase of the population, sufficiency of food supplies, the incidence of local and imperial taxes, the organization of adequate judicial and police arrangements, the spread of education and public health measures.' [55] It was felt by many British officials in the middle of the nineteenth century that caste and religion were the sociological keys to understanding the Indian people. If they were to be governed well, then it was natural that information should be systematically collected about caste and religion. At the same time as census operations were beginning to collect information about caste, the army was beginning to be reorganized on assumptions about the nature of 'martial races', questions were being raised about the balance between Hindus and Muslims in the public services, about whether certain castes or 'races' were monopolizing access to new educational opportunities, and a political theory was beginning to emerge about the conspiracy which certain castes were organizing to supplant British rule. The impetus to collect information on caste went way beyond the 'intellectual curiosity' of a few officials and was based in widespread and deeply- held beliefs about Indians by the British. Ideas about caste—its origins and functions—played much the same role in shaping policy in the latter half of the nineteenth century that ideas about the village community and the nature of property played in the first half of the nineteenth century. Attempts were made in the first census of 1871—2 to collect information on caste. The principle of organization was to try to place castes (*jatis*) in the four *varnas* or in categories of Outcastes and Aborigines. The writers of the individual provincial census reports tried to classify the castes in blocks. This effort failed owing to what Waterfield called intrinsic difficulties and the absence of a uniform system of classification. [56] From the beginning of the census operations

it was widely assumed that an all-India system of classification of castes could be developed.

In the development of a classification system for castes, there were two interlocked but operationally separable problems: the actual question which an enumerator asked an individual; then how this answer was interpreted by a clerk, and eventually by a supervisor of the census of a district or of a larger unit. The actual taking of the census was a two-step affair. Enumerators were appointed by circle supervisors, who were usually government officials. Supervisors were patwaris, zamindars, schoolteachers, or anyone who was literate. They were given a form with columns on which was to be entered information about every member of a household. The information to be collected was name, religion (e.g. Hindu, Muslim), sect, caste, subdivision of caste, sex, age, marital status, language, birthplace, means of subsistence, education, language in which literate, and infirmities. There was a one-month period before the actual date of the census in which the enumerator was to fill in the forms, and then on the day of the census he was to check the information with the head of the household.

As an aid to achieving standardization in the recording of information on caste and subcaste, lists were prepared as early as the 1881 census which gave standard names with variations for the castes. The supervisors were supposed to instruct the enumerators in how to classify responses. [57] The lists of castes were alphabetically arranged giving information on where they were to be found and containing very brief notes. For example, 'Shudra, found in Eastern Bengal, descended from maid servants by their masters of good caste; also called Golam or Golam Kayastha. The term Shudra is also used to indicate the various castes supposed to represent the fourth caste of Manu. In this sense the term is to be avoided in the census schedules'; or another example, 'Sutihar, Bihar, a low-caste who spin cotton thread. In some cases the term indicates the occupation only. Its use in this sense should be avoided.' A list of terms which should not be used was also provided. These were terms like Baniya, a generic term for trading castes; Bhojpura, when used to refer to all 'up-country men'; Naik, which was a

title; or Chakar, which was the name of a sub-caste. The list was headed —'List of vague and indefinite entries found in the census returns of 1891 that should be carefully excluded from colom *[sic]* 8 (caste) of the census schedules, except in the special cases where the term is said to indicate a *true caste.* Any difficulties that may arise should be reported from orders to the District Magistrate.' [58] The lists and instructions did not solve the problem of difficulties in the standardization of terminology for the enumerators, and, although in Bengal the number of people who were not classifiable in terms of their 'true' caste dropped from over 2,300,000 in 1891, there continued to be considerable correspondence about the names by which people were recorded.

The second order of problems came in the aggregation and presentation of the data on caste. In the 1881 census, the Commissioner for India, W.C. Plowden, decided that the caste tables as found in the reports should contain information on castes and tribes which contained more than 100,000 persons. The castes should be arranged in five categories: Brahmans, Rajputs, Castes of Good Social Position, Inferior Castes and Non-Hindus or Aboriginal Castes. Plowden foresaw difficulty in separating 'castes of good social position' and 'inferior castes' and the criterion to be used was that castes engaged in personal service such as Mehters, Kahars, and Dhobis would be in an 'inferior caste' class. He believed it would be possible to determine other castes, 'which the popular voice designates as inferior'. [59] It was left to the Provincial Census Commissioner to assign the class to which the caste belonged.

J.A. Bourdillon, Census Commissioner for Bengal, felt that the classification proposed by Plowden would do great violence to the facts of the caste system as found in Bengal. The Hinduized tribes, he felt should have separate classification. He also felt that some groups, such as the Kayasthas, Khandaits, and the Babhans, were immeasurably higher in social status than the Koiris and Kumhars with whom they were classified and were very close in status to Brahmans and Rajputs. Therefore, he proposed a category of intermediary castes to come right below the Rajputs and Brahmans. The Lieutenant-Governor consulted

Rajendra Lal Mitra, the outstanding Indian Sanskrit scholar of the time. Mitra set out an order of precedence, which included placing the Babhans (Bhumihars) in the same category as the Brahmans and ranking Kayasthas right below Rajputs. The Lieutenant-Governor ordered that any doubt about a caste's social position should be resolved by reference to Rajendra Lal Mitra's list. [60] Mitra based his scheme on what he termed 'Hindu ideas' of classification. He felt it was not the responsibility of the census to deal with claims for higher social positions such as were put forward by the Vaidyas of Burdwan, the Subarnabaniks, and the Kayasthas. 'Its [the census'] duty is clearly to follow the textbooks of the Hindus and not to decide on particular claims.' [61]

The next stage in the effort to determine caste precedence in the census grew out of the efforts under H.H. Risley's direction to conduct an ethnographic survey of Bengal. Risley drew up lists of castes ordered on the basis of 'social precedence' and then sent them out to a large number of Indians for the 'expression of your opinion on the correctness of the arrangement, considered with reference to your own district, or to any part of the country of which you have special experience.' [62] Among the recipients of the list were Sheonarain Lal Ray, Deputy Magistrate and Collector of Patna; Roy Kumar Sen, Lecturer at Dacca College; Tara Prasad Chatterjee, Deputy Magistrate of Burdwan; Asvini Kumar Basu, Additional Munsiff, Serampore; Dina Nath Dhar, Government Pleader at Dacca, as well as a number of Indians not in government employ. The correspondents were instructed to 'correct' the printed list by assigning different numbers to the castes named.

Most of Risley's correspondents were not content just to place numbers, but some consulted widely other Indians and wrote furious and often very learned notes to justify their assignments of rank. Some also heaped abuse on Risley's unnamed informants. 'It is against all notions of caste known in Hindu society to say that a Kshatriya or Vaishya is inferior in social rank to a Kayastha.' [63] In support of his position, Sen submitted a list drawn up by a professor of Sanskrit at Dacca in which Kayasthas were ranked below Mahisyas, a farming and

fishing caste of Bengal. Another correspondent, a Brahman, didn't understand why Kayasthas wanted to be ranked as Kshatriyas and why they wanted to 'obtain honours which heralds and Ghataks (genealogists) can bestow'. He points out that the Kayasthas had done well enough with occupational opportunities with which the British government had provided them and could outstrip Brahmans in this competitive field.

Most of Risley's correspondents cited sacred texts and legends to support their positions, the code of Manu and the *Brahma Vaivarta Purana* being most frequently cited. Kayastha respondents tended to cite the Ballal Sen story, a legendary account of the history of Bengal which places Kayasthas right below Brahmans. Others cited legal documents and English language legal textbooks such as *The Digest of Hindu Law* by Babu Syama Charan Sarkar, or a document filed in the criminal court of Tipperah district in 1823-4—a list of intermarriages amongst castes which led to the founding of the present castes of Bengal, signed by 100 pandits. However, the most frequent validation for altering Risley's list was reference to learned pandits and Sanskrit scholars. In the publication which grew out of Risley's inquiries, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal,* 4 vols, Calcutta, 1891, he sidestepped the social precedence question by listing the castes and tribes alphabetically.

Risley himself had a theoretical axe to grind in this and in his later publications, which was that 'race sentiment' was the basis of the caste system. On the first page of *Castes and Tribes of Bengal,* Risley described a stone panel from Sanchi, which depicts three 'aboriginal women' and a troop of monkeys praying at a small shrine. 'In the background, four stately figures—two men and two women—of tall stature and regular features . . . look with folded hands and apparent approval at this remarkable act of worship.' [64] Risley's interpretation of this scene is that it shows a higher race keenly conscious of differences but on friendly terms with a lower race. The book attempts to show, says Risley, that race sentiment, far from being 'a figment of the intolerant pride of the Brahman, rests upon a foundation of fact which scientific methods confirm, that it has shaped the intricate grouping of the caste system,

and has preserved the Aryan type in comparative purity throughout Northern India.' [65] In the 1901 census, which was done under Risley's direction, the question of caste precedence and of race came together and Risley felt that through anthropometric measurement he had confirmed his hypothesis that social precedence was based on a scale of racial purity.

The Rabbit Out of the Hat

This essay began with a discussion of a general cultural process—objectification—and has wound its way through some fragments of data and speculation regarding the census of India, and particularly the questions connected with the accumulation and presentation of data on caste. The implied argument is that the census was one of the situations in which Indians were confronted with the question of who they were and what their social and cultural systems were. I don't think that the act of a census enumerator asking a question of a peasant contributed too much to the process. I suspect in many instances that the questions weren't even asked and that many of the enumerators filled in the forms on the basis of their own knowledge of their neighbours—particularly on questions of caste, language, and religion. If there was a direct effect of the census on the mass of the Indian population, it was on the enumerators. To carry out the census in the late nineteenth century at least half a million Indians had to be involved in the process, and it was probably many more than that. The keys to the situation were the instructions given by the supervisors to their circle supervisors and by the circle supervisors to the enumerators. The Indians who mainly on a voluntary basis made the census possible were a highly significant group as they were literate and educated, even if only at a primary school level.

In the towns and cities there was interest in the information which the census generated. The formation of caste *sabhas* and their petitions to have their caste status changed indicates this. Recently Thomas Kessinger found a file in a District Record Office in Jullundur district in Punjab, which is a petition from a group called Mahtons who wanted to

be recorded in the census of 1911 as Rajputs. They based their claim on history and to the fact that they followed Rajput customs. Their claim was rejected at the district level as being too vague. The decision was written by the District Census Officer, Din Mohammad, who based his decision on the work of Ibbetson in the census of the Punjab in 1881 and on the work of the Settlement Officer. Din Mohammad argued though that the Mahtons had separated themselves from a tribe of hunters and scavengers called Mahatmas and had become agriculturalists. This separation would be symbolized by calling the agricultural section of the tribe Mahton Rajput. Din Mohammad appears to have accepted the claim of the Mahtons that they were recognized as Rajputs by the Rajput Pratnik Sabha of the Punjab and Kashmir, but since they didn't intermarry with the Rajputs they would have to be content with being recorded as Mahton Rajput.

The decision had immediate consequences. Apparently some of the Mahtons wanted to be able to join a Sikh regiment of the army and hence the recruiting officer for the regiment made an inquiry. Also, the Inspector of Schools of Jullundur district wanted to know how to rule on a request that the Mahtons be eligible for a zamindari scholarship established by the Punjab government for Sikh and Hindu Rajputs. [66] What is significant in this case is the awareness which a rural and obscure group had of the desirability of being recorded as Rajputs, not only from considerations of assumed social standing but from the direct benefits such a denomination would bring them.

In 1895 Fazl-i-Rabb, who was the dewan to the nawab of Murshidabad in Bengal, wrote a book on the origin of the Muslims of Bengal. It appeared both in English and in Bengali. [67] In this study Rabb takes W.W. Hunter, the compiler of the *Statistical Account of Bengal,* and H. Beverly, Census Commissioner of Bengal for the 1871-2 census, to task for assuming all the Muslims of Bengal were of low caste origin and converted from the Hindu population. In particular, Beverly became his target. 'We cannot say whether Mr Beverly has any ulterior object in exposing the Musalmans to contempt and ridicule by publishing such unjust opinions and lamentable conjecture and imaginative suspicion as

he has done.' [68] Rabb felt that because the Musalmans were being unjustly held up to ridicule before the whole world, the British government should 'repair the wrongs done to us Musalman subjects through the public writings of Mr Beverly and [we] solicit that the question at issue; viz., that of our origin and ancestor, be thoroughly enquired into with the help afforded by history and [that] the results of such investigation may be placed on record.' [69]

In 1931 the consciousness of the significance of the census operation had reached a point where Indians were not merely content to petition and to write books: some groups set out to influence the answers which people would give in the census. In Lahore, just before the preliminary enumeration a handbill was widely distributed by the census committee of the Arya Samaj in Lahore.

Remember!
Census Operations Have Begun

Question	*You should answer!*
Religion	Vedi Dharm
Sect	Arya Samajist
Caste	Nil
Race	Aryan
Language	Arya Bhasha [70]

Concern with counting the characteristics of the Indian population, which may have started as the intellectual concerns of a few British officials or the administrative necessity of knowing the 'natives', had become an object to be used in the political, cultural, and religious battles at the heart of Punjabi politics which have been crucial down to the present. The movement of objectification had moved by the 1930s from a small group of intellectuals in Calcutta searching for cultural tools with which to counter Western influences to the towns and

villages of much of India. In this process of classifying and making objective to the Indians themselves their culture and society, the census played a key role.

12

Myths, Symbols, and Community Satnampanth of Chhattisgarh*

Saurabh Dube

This paper [1] focuses on the symbolic forms and cultural logic of the myths and rituals of Satnampanth of Chhattisgarh. [2] I introduce the region and the low-caste endeavour, and discuss the sources for and the reconstruction of the mythic tradition of Satnampanth. [3] This sets the stage for the second step. I take up six themes within this mythic tradition to focus on the ordering of historical consciousness within myth, and thus elucidate the symbolic construction of Satnampanth. The constitution of Satnampanth as a community, an oppositional symbolic order, drew upon hegemonic and popular traditions. It was orchestrated by two major mythic figures, Ghasidas and Balakdas (father and son), who acted in complementary ways to establish Satnampanth. The new symbolic order was marked by an interrogation and critique of the relationships of power within the region. The resistance, which was conducted in a religious idiom, engaged with as well as subverted—but was also contained by—hegemonic limits. I address these questions, which involve categories of domination and subordination, religion and resistance, and hegemony and community, in a narrative which is a dialogue and play between concept and evidence.

Chhattisgarh and Satnampanth

Chhattisgarh is a large region bounded through linguistic ties—the vernacular Chhattisgarhi is a dialect of the language group called Eastern Hindi—in south-eastern Madhya Pradesh. This geographically and politically isolated region was held by a succession of different dynasties till about AD 1000, and by the Kalachuris for the next seven and a half centuries. At the same time, the internal political order of Chhattisgarh was characterized by a hierarchical political structure based on clans which controlled their own small kingdoms, and by an acceptance of the structural features of local institutions. [4] In the middle of the eighteenth century Chhattisgarh came to be ruled by the Marathas. Maratha rule in Chhattisgarh was carried on between 1758 and 1787 by Bimbaji, the youngest son of the Bhonsla king Raghoji I of Nagpur, and after that by *subahdars* who governed in the name of the Bhonsla king. The Marathas introduced a more centralized rule (particularly in revenue administration) and inducted Maharashtrian Brahmins and Marathas in key administrative positions; the subahdars paid a specific sum to the raja at Nagpur which was collected with the help of military force from village headmen. [5] In 1818, after the Maratha defeat in the battle of Sitabaldi, the Bhonslas became a subsidiary ally of the colonial power. In the period between 1818 and 1830, when the Bhonsla king was a minor, the administration of Chhattisgarh was carried on by British superintendents. Major vans Agnew, the most enterprising of the superintendents, introduced a number of significant measures during his tenure (1818-25). [6] In June 1830 Raghoji III came of age. The administration reverted to the Bhonsla king. Chhattisgarh was once again governed by subahdars; the Marathas did not undo the changes introduced by British administrators. Raghoji III died without an heir. In March 1854 the kingdom of Nagpur became a part of the dominion of the East India Company under the doctrine of lapse. The colonial regime built up a comprehensive structure of administration; the British system of law and order, constituted by civil and criminal judicial administration and by the police, worked in tandem with a revenue administration which

was marked by well- defined property relations under the Malguzari Settlement.

Satnampanth was initiated in the first half of the nineteenth century among the Chamars, an untouchable group, of Chhattisgarh. Ghasidas was born into a family of sharecroppers and farm servants (Saonjias) in the late eighteenth century in Girod in the north-eastern part of Raipur district. The Chamars constituted a significant proportion— about twenty per cent—of the population of Chhattisgarh; they either owned land or were Saonjias who received one-fourth of the produce as their share. [7] The Chamars, on joining Satnampanth, became Satna- mis. The Satnamis had to abstain from meat, liquor, tobacco, certain vegetables—tomatoes, chillies, aubergines—and red pulses. They were prohibited from using cows, as opposed to bullocks, in any of their agricultural operations, and from ploughing after the mid-day meal. Satnampanth rejected the deities and idols of the Hindu pantheon and had no temples. Members were asked to believe only in Satnam and were expected to repeat the name, morning and evening, facing the sun. There were to be no distinctions of caste within Satnampanth. Ghasidas began a *guru parampara* (tradition) which was hereditary. Satnampanth developed a stock of myths, rituals, beliefs, and practices which were associated with the gurus and constituted the Satnami mythic tradition. We get reliable estimates and a picture of the Satnami population, its distribution, and the Satnami location within the social structure from the second half of the nineteenth century. The first census was undertaken on the night of 5 November 1866. The Chamars constituted about 20 per cent—362,032 of 2,103,165—of the total population of Chhattisgarh. The census added: the 'Chamars of these provinces are almost confined to the country of Chhattisgarh. They in no way resemble the Chamars who are leather workers and drudges of northern India. Here the Chamars have thrown off Brah- manical influence, have set up a new creed, possess a high priest and priesthood of their own.' The statement indicates the confusion between Satnamis and Chamars which was commented on by colonial administrators, but which persisted into the twentieth century. A large proportion of the Satnamis lived in a corridor running from the area between Raipur and

Durg towns, north and eastward on each side of the Seonath river, to the eastern borders of Raipur and Bilaspur districts. The period between the late nineteenth century and mid twentieth century revealed few variations in the concentration and the percentage to the total of the Satnami population in Chhattisgarh. The Satnamis were primarily tenants, agricultural labourers, and a few Malguzars. Most reports described them as peasants dependent on the produce of their land which they cultivated themselves. In Bilaspur the group constituted roughly 28 per cent, in Durg 25 per cent, and in Raipur 28 per cent of the total tenant population of these areas in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. [8]

How do we explain the making of Satnampanth? The first difficulty in answering the question is the absence of firm and accurate chronology. British administrators, writing in the middle and late 1860s, dated the 'formulation of the Satnami creed' to the decade between 1820 and 1830. [9] The administrators were, however, relying upon the oral testimony of their informants which cannot be counted on for accuracy. We also need to entertain the possibility that what we have here is an instance of the making of a colonial myth: it was only after the inception of British rule in 1818 that a low-caste monotheistic sect, which opposed the caste system, could come into existence. The other source on Satnampanth, the *Vanshavali* (genealogy) of the Gurus, is rooted in mythic categories; it would be a mistake and an imposition to arbitrarily extract 'historical' elements from myth. [10] We cannot be certain about the specific year or decade of the beginning of Satnampanth. At the same time, the making of Satnampanth was a process that happened over several decades: we need to locate it over the first half of the nineteenth century. At this point we run into a second difficulty. Early-nineteenth-century sources on Chhat- tisgarh tell us very little about the nature of social relationships, continuities, changes, and ruptures in the texture of village life and the cultural order which attended the formation and development of Satnampanth. [11] The most detailed evidence for this period refers to the political institutions and administrative and revenue practices in the region. [12] I shall

provide a brief account, based on these sources, of the background and the context to the formation of Satnampanth. [13]

The last two decades of Bhonsla rule were characterized by political uncertainty. Maharashtrian Brahmins and Marathas replaced traditional authority at different levels of the administrative structure. The sociopolitical order was disrupted. There was an increasing extortion of land revenue. As a result, the lower castes were, on the one hand, discriminated against by the specific caste character of Bhonsla administration and, on the other, pushed to the margins of village society because of the institution of *lakhabata*. [14] Raids by Pindaris shook the entire edifice. The period following the beginnings of British rule in 1818 were attended by displacements in the centre of authority: the change from the Bhonsla raja to the Angrez Sarkar (British rule) was underscored by the new administrative measures of British superintendents; in 1830 the province reverted back to Maratha rule and the subahdar occupied centre stage. [15] The administrative measures of Agnew (1820—5) abolished the hereditary office of the *patel* and increased the powers of the *gaontia* (village headman) and the village *panchayat*. There was a shift in the locus of power from the patel to the gaontia and the panchayat at the level of the village; [16] relationships structured by caste and its constituent principles, a critical element in the dynamics of village life, assumed importance. Finally, the period witnessed two simultaneous processes in the field of revenue administration and practices. The British modified the Maratha revenue system through an abolition of supplementary revenue demands and the unauthorized perquisites of officials, the fixation of times for payment of revenue instalments, and the grant of receipts for payments to officials, which tended to suit well off *raiyats.* At the same time, there were no radical changes effected in the method of assessment and in revenue practices, particularly in the institution of lakhabata: this worked against the poor and cattleless agriculturists— these included a high proportion of Chamars. Such processes of continuity and change —dislocations within the socio-political order and rapid displacements in the centre of authority; the discriminatory character of Bhonsla

administration towards low castes and the increased salience of relationships structured by caste within village life; the marginalization of subordinate groups because of high levels of extortion of revenue and the institution of lakhabata—provided the context to the formation of Satnampanth. Satnampanth was a new symbolic power centre which resisted the caste system by drawing upon its constituent principles, and registered protest against Chamars being pushed to the margins of village society.

There are, however, limits to this exercise. It is one thing to present a sketch of the social relations and the political and administrative configuration within the region and assert that they contributed the 'objective' circumstances, the 'context', which defined the formation of Satnampanth; a necessary exercise, it is nonetheless a truism. It is quite another matter to reconstruct the principles of the socio-cultural order and the determinate relationships which provided the conditions for the establishment of Satnampanth. The sources do not allow us to construct such a picture. Equally, we do not have the material to attempt a chronological account of the development of Satnampanth. Does this recognition of limits and of an absence close off the possibilities of making sense of Satnampanth? I answer the rhetorical question by turning to a different, alternative, account of Satnampanth.

The Reconstruction of a Mythic Tradition

This paper lies at an intersection of two mutually reinforcing sets of historiographical and theoretical influences: the field of possibility defined by people's history, particularly the *Subaltern Studies* endeavour, and my interest in caste and religion, situated in a dialogue between history and anthropology. It was this matrix which defined the need to shift from a focus on moments of overt rebellion and physical revolt of subordinate groups to the question of the meaning and nuances of subaltern resistance. I was specifically interested in the manner in which a subordinate group resisted and questioned authority in the idiom of religion. What was at stake was a recognition of the intermeshing of domination, subordination, and resistance in subaltern

lives and of exploring the critical place of religion and caste in structuring the beliefs and practices of subordinate groups.

My point of entry was a social history of Satnamis and Satnampanth. Recent studies of low-caste movements have focused on religion as a mode of coping with and transforming an oppressive social order; the articulation of these initiatives was linked to popular tradition and popular culture. [17] At the same time, these exercises centre on the leadership and organization of low-caste movements—the Ad Dharm in Punjab and the Satyashodhak Samaj in western India—which have left behind a set of well-defined written sources. Other studies of the dynamics of low-caste groups are a part of the anthropological tradition: they are based on detailed ethnographic accounts, rooted in the present, which were constructed through fieldwork. [18] I faced a problem: the Satnami Gurus and organizational structure did not possess written sources; after my initial visit to Chhattisgarh, I was struck by the limits more than the possibilities of reconstructing the history of Satnampanth primarily through fieldwork and the methods of oral history. The difficulties, in fact, underscored the need for alternative sources and non-official histories. I chanced upon a curious text, a written intervention within an oral tradition, called *Guru Ghasidas Ki Vanshavali* (The Genealogy of Guru Ghasidas). [19]

The text was the outcome of an interesting historical encounter. In the early 1920s a set of influential members of Satnampanth had got together with local Hindu reformers and Congress leaders in Chhattisgarh to set up an organization called the Satnami Mahasabha. The Satnami Mahasabha was an effort to negotiate the network of elite organizational and constitutional politics within the region and in the Central Provinces, and to reform the Satnamis. [20] In the winter of 1925 Naidass and Anjordass, the major leaders of the Satnami Mahasabha, travelled with a small group of Satnamis to the Kanpur session of the Indian National Congress. In the course of the Kanpur Congress the Satnami contingent and its leaders met Baba Ram- chandra. Shridhar Balwant Jodhpurkar, alias Baba Ramchandra, a Maharashtrian Brahmin, had left home at an early age, wandered through central and

western India, worked variously as a coolie, a vendor, a labourer, and in 1905 had gone to Fiji as an indentured labourer and lived there for several years. After his return from Fiji Baba Ramchandra had involved himself in organizing and leading a militant and radical Kisan Sabha movement between 1918 and 1920 in the Awadh countryside. [21] In 1925 Baba Ramchandra was disenchanted with a 'capitalist congress'. [22] The Satnamis fired his imagination. The private papers of Baba Ramchandra reveal that he travelled back to Chhattisgarh with the Satnamis, stayed there till the late 1920s, and was closely involved in the activities and in specifying the trajectory of the Satnami Mahasabha. The writing of the *Vanshavali* was one of the several consequences of the encounter between Baba Ramchandra and the Satnamis. [23]

The Satnamis have a repertoire of myths, most of them about the Gurus, which are also statements about Satnampanth. It was these myths which were taken down by Baba Ramchandra under the title *Guru Ghasidas ki Vanshavali*. The *Vanshavali* is a curious handwritten manuscript: the script is Devnagari in a running hand; the language draws upon Hindi, Chhattisgarhi, and Marathi; the text, unlike Ramchandra's other writings among the Satnamis, bears the impress of his rapid noting of myths as they were narrated by his informants. We know nothing about the year when the *Vanshavali* was written by Baba Ramchandra; it could have been any time in the second half of the 1920s. Moreover, we cannot be certain of the possible use for which it was intended. What we do know is that Baba Ramchandra wrote down Satnami myths which were a part of the oral tradition.

The myths were accompanied by a stock of rituals and practices within Satnampanth. The rituals and practices were recorded by colonial administrators in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their effort was, in fact, a part of the drive of the colonial state to set up effective rule and gain access to its subjects: the specification of well-defined property relations; the 'policing' and surveillance of people through law-enforcement agencies; a concern with collecting reliable estimates of population, and documenting the customs of people. The writings of the administrators on the Satnamis

have something of a 'family air'; they refer to and cite each other as a part of a common endeavour to document and order the customs, rituals, and practices of a strange, indeed aberrant, people of Chhattisgarh. [24] I draw upon the arguments of historians and anthropologists, situated within different traditions, to fashion a reading which aligns the myths in the *Vanshavali* with the rituals and practices recorded by administrators.

We have been warned against a mode of reading which invokes the 'will to truth' to suppress the equally present 'will to power' in a text. [25] The question of the relations of power within which the *Vanshavali* and the writings of administrators were constructed needs to be posed. In the *Vanshavali* an alive, continuously performed oral tradition was given the fixity of the written form. Moreover, the *Vanshavali* was compiled in the context of Satnami Mahasabha activities; an initiative which sought to appropriate Satnami beliefs to a version of dominant Hinduism. We need to be wary of the imprint of a reordered and reworked Hindu 'tradition' which Ramchandra and his informants could have left on the *Vanshavali*. The writings of the administrators were ordered by a determinate cultural scheme: a religion had to be situated within a history which was linear and chronological; the essence of a religion lay in its basic tenets; the essence—the 'truth'—had to be separated from the inevitable accretion of superstition; the basic tenets of the Satnami faith—a monotheistic sect opposed to the caste system and idolatry—could, by an ethnocentric act of will, be found to resemble Christianity. The writings, shaped in the crucible of this cultural order of things, were marked by selectiveness, an obsessive concern with chronology and an insidious, because silent, practice of appropriation. The *Vanshavali* does not provide us, of necessity, with direct testimony of the Satnamis; in the administrators' writings the distortions are the offspring of a culturally legitimated and sanctioned desire for 'truth'.

I would like to suggest, however, that the two sets of sources can be read to reconstruct the play of symbolic forms and the cultural logic of Satnampanth. The construction of the *Vanshavali* suggests that the

myths were hurriedly written as they were narrated: the attempt to form complete sentences is given up very soon; the *Vanshavali* conveys a sense of Ramchandra groping for words and drawing upon his knowledge of Hindi, Marathi, and Chhattisgarhi. In an effort to capture the basic pattern of the myths sentences break off, and there is a jump to what follows in a story. Baba Ramchandra's attempt was to retain the continuity of the narrative. A text made possible by literacy can still be rooted within an oral tradition and mythical categories: the devices of a literate tradition are a 'veneer'; the real meaning of the work emerges from its mythical form. [26] In the *Vanshavali* the imprint of Hindu tradition exists, in an important sense, in the use of particular words and forms of expression. Baba Ramchandra did not have the time to work upon and transform the myths. The text, as we shall see, carries the immediacy of face-to-face interaction characteristic of an oral tradition. Moreover, the *Satnam Sagar,* Baba Ramchandra's effort to give the Satnamis an 'official' history, was organized along separate lines and followed a different trajectory from the *Vanshavali*: the tract opens with an elaborate cosmological account of the origins of the universe; various Hindu gods and goddesses occupy a significant position; the Satnami Gurus put in an appearance but are appropriated for and situated on the axis of a modified and reworked Hindu tradition. [27] Finally, I established during my fieldwork that the myths recorded by Baba Ramchandra continue to be a part of an ongoing Satnami oral tradition. [28] In the *Vanshavali* the basic structure and relations, the internal organization of the Satnami mythic order, was not compromised by the written form. And what of the writings of administrators and ethnographers? The symbolic forms of Satnami beliefs and practices lie in the descriptions—submerged within the interstices—of this highly ordered corpus of knowledge. The symbolic forms can be reclaimed from an ethnocentric mode of appropriation to an exercise which seeks to recover the logic of Satnampanth. I shall read the two sets of sources to understand the mythic tradition of Satnampanth. [29]

The mythic tradition was made up of myths and beliefs, rituals and practices. The elements within this mythic tradition had developed within a determinate context over a period of time: a creative cultural process which involved accretions and deletions and, within limits, improvisation. The myths in the *Vanshavali* had been created over a hundred years. The writings of administrators—themselves separated from each other in time—had relied on informants and drawn upon an oral tradition. They were based on stories which had grown over time. This makes for imprecision in terms of chronology. We have, in fact, noted the inadequacy of sources to provide a chronological account of the development of Satnami myths and rituals and to reconstruct the principles of the socio-cultural order and the set of relationships which provided the conditions for the genesis of Satnampanth. At the same time, the limits remind us of possibilities: 'To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognise "the way it really was" . . . It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.' [30] What I do is to seize hold of glimpses of this mythic tradition, at points of intersection, embedded within relationships of power—in other words, fragments of 'a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger'—and piece them together.

The exercise serves to violate the 'official conceptions' of Satnampanth: the voice of the administrator, the upper-caste superordinate, the historian. [31] First, instead of setting up an opposition between 'history' and 'myth' I treat myth as a form of ordering of historical consciousness: the mythic tradition suggests the way in which Satnamis made sense of Satnampanth. Second, I focus on the internal order and structure of the mythic tradition: Satnampanth was constituted in symbolic ways; the specific symbols within its myths and rituals, drawn from hegemonic and popular traditions, were implicated in the definition of the boundary of Satnampanth. [32] Finally, Ghasidas and Balakdas, the major mythic figures of Satnampanth, played a critical role: the Gurus effected resolutions and negotiated figures of authority who populated the cosmic and social order to define the boundary and orchestrate the construction of Satnampanth. The three

movements served to interrogate relationships of power—constituted by the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution, a construct of kingship and dominant caste with cultural and ritual significance, and colonial power—within Chhattisgarh. The arguments are worked through and underscore the telling of a tale which begins with the initiation of Ghasidas and ends with the death of Balakdas.

Miracles, Trials, Ordeals, and the Initiation of Ghasidas

The *Vanshavali* opens with Ghasidas' encounter with his landed master: a critical step in the constitution of the mythic status of the guru. Ghasidas made his *tapsthan* (place of worship) in Girodpuri. After performing *tap* (worship), he took up the work of ploughing in the field of a Marar (a caste which, traditionally, grows vegetables). Ghasidas picked up the *nagar* (plough) on his shoulder; his master started walking behind him. The master saw that the plough was suspended in the air above Ghasidas' shoulder. When they reached the field the master joined the plough to the bullocks. Once again he saw that Ghasidas' hand was above the handle of the plough which was moving on its own. Until the revenue settlement operations, carried out by the colonial regime in the 1860s, the plough was the basis of assessment of land revenue in Chhattisgarh. A nagar or a plough of land was an elastic measure intended to represent the area which one plough and four oxen could cultivate: the plough was the basis both for the apportioning of land and the revenue demand of the state within the village. [33] In a land-surplus situation, within a social order in which the plough was charged with ritual significance, the nagar was a critical metaphor of power within the work process and in everyday village life. The plough was, in a manner at once substantive and symbolic, constitutive of the relationship between a ploughman and his master. Ghasidas works for his Marar master; he does not carry the burden of his master's plough on his shoulder and his hand remains above the *mooth* (handle) of the plough. Ghasidas had effected a move to transform his relationship, mediated by the nagar, with his agricultural master.

The response of the master was, characteristically, one of uncertainty. He thought Ghasidas was a trickster. Ghasidas pacified him and pledged that he would continue to work for the master. The Marar master's uncertainty about Ghasidas was to end soon; it had to await Ghasidas' meeting with Satnampurush:

> Ghasidas ploughed the field and left the bullocks to graze. The field was next to a mountain and the bullocks went there. When Ghasidas went there to bring back the bullocks Satnam emerged, having assumed a *chaitanya swarup*. [34] It was there that Ghasidas met *shwetpurush* Satnam. [35] Satnampurush said to Ghasidas, 'I had sent you to reform the *vansh* (lineage), but you forgot and have started working for others. This entire Chamar vansh has got spoilt. Have you forgotten this? Intoxicated by meat and liquor these *sants* (holy men) who have come from Kashi have got ruined. You spread the name of Satnam. I am Satnampurush, know me.' So Ghasidas said, 'Who will believe my word since in order to look after my wife and two children I work for other people?' Satnampurush answered, 'I shall bring all the sants to you. You give them *pan* (betel leaf) and make them repeat the name of Satnam.' Ghasidas, once again, refused; Satnampurush tied two pieces of coconut to Ghasidas' clothes.

The encounter was critical for the definition of relationships between Satnampurush, Ghasidas, and the Chamars within Satnampanth. First, Ghasidas is the person who had been sent by Satnampurush to reform the Chamars. The Chamars, in turn, are a vansh, a lineage. The use of a metaphor of kinship emphasizes the boundedness of Chamars as a community: a collectivity whose destiny could be orchestrated by its mythic figures. Ghasidas had forgotten to reform his own people, his vansh, and was working for others. The Chamars, as a result, had taken to *mas madira* (meat and liquor); the sants from Kashi had been ruined. In the reference to Kashi what is at work, perhaps, is a coming together of Satnami notions of their origins in the north, [36] and the fact that *Kashi ke sant* conferred a ritually pure status on the Chamars. Second, it was of essence that this state of purity be restored. The Chamars had to

be reformed through knowing Satnam; the name of Satnam had to be spread. Satnampurush was to bring the Chamars to a reluctant Ghasidas. Third, Ghasidas' refusal to follow the orders of Satnampurush was on account of his working for other people: he had to accept the apparent subordination that followed in order to look after his wife and children.

Ghasidas took the plough and the bullocks to the master. The master said, 'Ghasidas I shall not have you work because your body appears peculiar to me. It seems as though you have a *mukut* (crown), *chatarbhuj* (four arms), and a *shankh* (conch shell). I have never seen your body like this.' The master, overwhelmed by the form, cried 'Jai Guru Ghasidas' and fell at Ghasidas' feet. The reversal which had begun with the change in the relation of Ghasidas' body to the nagar had been completed by the submission of the Marar master. The master's act was brought about, as the repetition within the narrative emphasizes, by the change in Ghasidas' form after his encounter with Satnampurush. The transformed *roop* of Ghasidas was implicated in the establishment of Ghasidas as a guru. It proved the final step in effecting a resolution of the contradiction between the authority of Ghasidas—a low-caste labourer and ploughman—and his middle- caste agricultural master. At the same time, what lay ahead were trials, ordeals, and obstacles. These constituted a 'barrier'. [37] The 'barrier' had to be overcome before Ghasidas was initiated into his new status.

Ghasidas was to lose his two children and his wife. When he came back from the Marar's house the children ran up to him and ate the pieces of coconut. Ghasidas' wife gave him water and food. After eating, when he sat down, the children died. Ghasidas was being put through an ordeal. The coconut, we need to recall, had been tied to Ghasidas' clothes by Satnampurush. Ghasidas was taken by surprise; the response of his wife and neighbours was of bewilderment and anguish. The children were buried with the advice of the *jati*? [38] After three days Ghasidas took the ritual bath, finished other jati rituals, and slept with his wife. The wife died at night. She too was buried. What is striking is the very ordinariness of the acts of Ghasidas, of eating and of sleeping

with his wife, which led to the deaths. The acts spoke of routine domesticity and of ties within the family. With the death of his children and his wife the ties were broken, the domesticity was no more:

> Ghasidas *akele rah gaye, vairagya utpanna ho gaya* (Ghasidas was left alone, a mood of renunciation set in). He went to a mountain in Sonakhan. There Satnampurush assumed the form of a tiger and ran towards him. So Ghasidas said, 'Yes, you have eaten three; eat me as well.' The tiger bowed his head. Then Satnampurush assumed the form of a python. Ghasidas went up to him and asked to be eaten; the python bowed his head. When night fell, Ghasidas climbed a Tendu tree and put a*phansi* (noose) around his neck; the noose left him and he sat down. Ghasidas thought that he had not tied the noose properly. A second time he tied his neck tightly to the Tendu tree; the branch of the tree bent down and reached the ground. Satnampurush assumed the *chatarbhuj roop* (four-armed form) and stood aside. He then said to Ghasidas that he had again forgotten to worship Satnam. He was asked to spread the name of Satnam and make the place into a *dham* (a site of pilgrimage) and get it worshipped: 'You do tap here for six months and the Chamars nearby will come to this dham. You feed them pan; get them to worship the name of Satnam; the idols of gods and goddesses in their houses should be thrown out.' Ghasidas replied that his wife and children had died and he was being asked to get a name worshipped. He could not do it. So Satnampurush said to Ghasidas, 'l will make everyone alive, but the name of Satnam should be spread. l am telling you to do tap here; after six months l will make your son and daughter alive.' After saying this Satnampurush disappeared and Ghasidas started doing tap there. ln the mean while, people of the caste and family tried to find Ghasidas. When they could not find him they gave the funeral feast. For six months Ghasidas did tap. He purified his body. For six months he left all food and drink. After six months Satnam emerged again in the same form. Ghasidas recognized that roop and touched the feet of Satnam. At the place where Satnam had kept his feet there emerged a *kund* (pond). From that pond *amrit* (nectar) was obtained. ln that water Satnam made Ghasidas have a bath and then gave him amrit. Satnampurush

then asked Ghasidas, 'Now have you experienced Satnam *(Satnam kipartit hut)?*. Ghasidas answered, 'Maharaj, l have experienced your roop *(Apke roop ki partit ho* gayi)'. Telling him the *vidhi* (rule) of making *shishya* (disciples), Satnampurush brought Ghasidas to *asli tapsthan* (the real/original place of worship) and asked him to give *nariyal* (coconut) and pan and spread the name of Satnam. Satnampurush said, 'i shall give all the Chamars the dream of this name and send them to this place' and then went back to his *lok* (world).

This can be read as the story of the initiation of Ghasidas that was directed by Satnampurush. Satnampurush, in various guises, put Ghasidas through the ordeal of death. The revelation by Satnampurush of his true form, after Ghasidas failed to see that it was he who held the noose, was a statement of the power of Satnampurush. Ghasidas' mistake was that he still did not know Satnampurush; he had not worshipped and spread the name of Satnam. Satnampurush instructed him on what had to be done for the creation of Satnampanth; Ghasidas refused. It was the assurance that he would make Ghasidas' wife and children alive which resolved the problem. ln their first meeting Satnampurush had emphasized that Ghasidas had to know him: *'Mein khud Satnampurush hoon mujhepahchan* (I am Satnampurush, recognize/know me). The later events resulted from his inadequate *pahchanana* (knowing/recognition) of Satnam. It was after Ghasidas carried out the instructions of Satnampurush and cleansed his body through tap that full recognition followed. To know/recognize Satnampurush was to accept Satnam. Satnampurush created the kund, gave Ghasidas amrit, and purified him: he conducted Ghasidas' rite of initiation. Satnampurush also provided that little extra—the rule for creating disciples, a dream to the Chamars—that gurus need. The conditions of possibility of Ghasidas becoming the guru of a reformed *chamarvansh*, of the creation of Satnampanth, had been fulfilled.

The theme is familiar: a figure new to a mythic tradition passes through ordeals set up by the supreme deity till the final moment when the mythic figure recognizes the deity's powers and is simultaneously

incorporated into the mythic tradition. [39] At the same time, what we find in the Satnami mythic tradition is a play on the familiar theme. The relationship between Satnampurush and Ghasidas is ambiguous. The ambiguity, I suggest, is linked to the specific character of the mythic tradition of Satnampanth. The Satnami mythic tradition was a new construct: both Ghasidas and Satnampurush, unknown in their specific roop had to be established within this mythic tradition. What we find is a double movement: Ghasidas had to pass through trials and ordeals set up by Satnampurush before he was initiated as a guru; Ghasidas in turn put Satnampurush through tests. From the moment of their first encounter, at each step, Satnampurush had to counter the resistance offered by Ghasidas. In the trials which Ghasi- das underwent with the tiger and the python the tables were turned. Ghasidas recognized that it was Satnampurush who had come in the form of the tiger and the python; when he addressed Satnampurush he offered a challenge: 'Yes, you have eaten three, eat me as well.' The tiger, the python, the branch of the tree, bowed down before Ghasidas. The note of resistance was struck, once again, when Ghasidas refused to follow the orders of Satnampurush because his wife and children had been taken away from him. All this is related to the fact that Ghasidas, in spite of the mood of renunciation *(vairagya),* is not quite a 'world renouncer'. More about this a little later. My point here is that Ghasidas' resistance bore the mark of, and carried forward the ambiguity in, the relationship between these two mythic figures. It was by tying the pieces of coconut to Ghasidas' clothes, by effecting a separation between Ghasidas and his wife and children, by setting up ordeals, by providing the assurance that his wife and children would be made alive, by directing this dramatic course of events that Satnampurush was recognized in his true roop by Ghasi- das. Two new mythic figures were established within a new mythic tradition. [40] We can, of course, follow a mode of reading which hunts out and effects resolutions within a text. We can then argue that the challenges offered by Ghasidas and the elements which denied the ambiguous character of the relationship between the two figures were no more than steps in a sequential pattern. The moment of Ghasidas' recognition of the true form of Satnampurush was the moment of

resolution: it established the superiority of Satnampurush over Ghasidas. Such a strategy of reading— marked by an ease born out of familiarity—would, however, be an imposition. It obscures the fact that the ambiguity in the relationship between Satnampurush and Ghasidas is structured into the Satnami mythic tradition. The Satnamis, when questioned specifically on the matter, distinguish between the two figures who occupied separate worlds. At the same time, in the course of conversation, the powers, and in fact the figures of Ghasidas and Satnampurush, are often conflated. Vijay Guru, the present Satnami Guru, said that 'Ghasidas was Satpurush, he was everything.' [41] The confusion, the mix up, I would like to suggest has to do with a characteristic of an oral tradition. An oral tradition can sustain multiple identities so that a character does not have to be either 'a' or 'b'; s/he can be 'a' and 'b' at the same time. In an allegorical mode of reading rooted within an oral tradition the metaphoric juxtaposition of 'a' and 'b' effectively implies that to say that 'a' is 'b' is both to say that 'a' is 'a' and that 'a' is 'b'. In the Satnami mythic tradition the confusion between Ghasidas and Satnampurush was the narrative equivalent of metaphor. Satnampurush was a metaphor of power: what was important was the metaphoric juxtaposition of Satnampurush and Ghasidas. [42] The Satnami mythic tradition, we have seen, worked towards certain kinds of resolutions. A clear separation and sorting out of the identities of Ghasidas and Satnampurush was not one of them. The ambiguity and tension in the relationship between Ghasidas and Satnampurush was not resolved in terms of one being superior to the other; it was handled by the two figures working in tandem, each giving his power and attributes to the other, establishing and reinforcing the Satnami mythic tradition.

The constitution of Ghasidas as a guru was premised upon elements of different symbolic systems. Ghasidas had to 'renounce' his wife and children, to be dead to the world, and to perform tap to cleanse his body. He was a novice who was purified by Satnampurush through amrit before he was initiated into his new status. [43] At the same time, Ghasidas went through the exercise only after Satnampurush gave him

his word that the wife and children would be brought back to life. Moreover, Ghasidas did not come back as a 'renouncer'; he was brought to the world, reclaimed by his jati people—who had earlier buried him. In the mythic tradition of Satnampanth Ghasidas' wife had both been sleeping and been dead for six months. It was, significantly, after Ghasidas woke her up, brought her back to life, and fixed her broken arm that Chamars started becoming Satnamis in large numbers. Finally, Ghasidas possessed the characteristics of a saint, a shaman, a healer. He fulfilled his followers' desire for the birth of a child, gave a blind Banjara (gypsy) the gift of sight, cured snake-bites and repaired bodies. [44] Healing is a mode of coping with and transforming an oppressive social order. The signs of physical discord are also the signifiers of an aberrant world; the desired transformations in the world focus upon healing as a mode of coping with and transforming an oppressive social order. [45] Ghasidas healed the bodies of members of Satnampanth.

An Oppositional Symbolic Order: Rituals and Practices

The initiation of Ghasidas launched Satnampanth. [46] The ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution provided a set of focal signs that were appropriated by Satnampanth: the Panth cast off impure substances and practices. Ghasidas' rite of initiation had cleansed and purified his body. Ghasidas forbade the Satnamis meat, liquor, tobacco, and certain pulses and vegetables which were the bearers of impurity and, often, the signifiers of a low ritual status. The members of Satnampanth were prohibited the use of cows for cultivation and were asked not to plough after the midday meal. The Satnamis, as Chamars, had removed the carcasses of cows, bullocks, and buffaloes within the village; they had a claim on the skins and the flesh, which they ate, of the dead animals. The new prohibitions which effected a change in the Satnami relationship with the sacred cow sought to end the stigma attached to their earlier caste practice and to establish a claim of purity. The rejection of caste distinctions within Satnampanth was, similarly, accompanied by prohibitions: Satnamis did not accept water from a non-Satnami; members of impure castes—for instance, Dhobis

(washermen), Ghasias (a caste involved in taking care of horses and looking after stables), and Mehtars (sweepers)—were not allowed into Satnampanth. [47]

The accent within Satnampanth was on the purity of the body. The purity had to be maintained. The gurus played a critical role. An annual fair at Bhandar, the home of Ghasidas, was a major pilgrimage for members of Satnampanth. Moreover, Ghasidas began the tradition of *ramat:* the gurus travelled to areas with a concentration of Satnami population to provide darshan. In the pilgrimage to Bhandar and during ramat the Satnamis offered coconuts and money to the guru and then drank the water, amrit, in which they had washed the gurus' feet; they also carried back amrit to their villages in hollow bamboo pipes. Amrit purified the body within Satnampanth. It had an important role, at moments of crisis, when Satnampanth was thrown into disarray. The deputy superintendent of police, Raipur, in the context of the famine of 1868—9, noted:

> Even Satnamee Chamars who by the precepts of their faith are forbidden to indulge in animal food thought nothing of stealing, killing and eating buffaloes and cows or even of devouring such as they found dead. They also indulged in *Mussor* and certain *Bhajees* or spinaches which in times of greater plenty they had prided themselves in abstaining from, about which unorthodox practices when taunted by their neighbours, who rejoiced in seeing the reformers breaking through their rules and observances, they would excuse themselves by saying that necessity had no laws and all that they would have to do would be to obtain absolution from the Gooru. [48]

The breaking of rules and transgression of norms did not, of course, require moments of crisis. They occurred in the everyday life of Satnam. Amrit was a purificatory mode which continuously integrated Satnams into Satnampanth. We have here another instance of the repositioning of a sign and practice embedded within the divine and ritual hierarchy of dominant Hinduism. [49] The Satnami gurus had claimed the *charanamrit* from the deities of the Hindu pantheon and the

superordinates within the ritual hierarchy of caste society. The appropriation of charanamrit, which purified bodies, was one more step in the construction of the oppositional symbolic order of Satnampanth.

Satnampanth interrogated caste by drawing upon the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution. The argument needs to be worked out in steps. Louis Dumont has suggested the existence of a consensus which cuts across castes within the Hindu social order. [50] Michael Moffat has worked out the argument for an untouchable community. [51] We can extend and radicalize their work to suggest that the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution constitutes one of the principal defining axes of the hegemonic and dominant symbolic order. [52] However, hegemony should not be turned into a closed system of total ideological and cultural control by dominant groups. An axiomatic limitation of ideological domination is the impossibility of total subjection: dominant discourse cannot reach all parts of every people, and the corollary to this is that it is impossible to be certain of the effects on the parts it does reach. [53] The ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution cannot exhaust the range of practice, energy, and intention of all actors, each caste, within the social order. We can, in fact, argue that the symbols within the hegemonic ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution are differentially appropriated within caste society. [54] As Sperber puts it, 'a symbolic representation determines a focal condition, deter-mines an evocational field, but does not determine the paths of evocation.' [55] The ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution acted as an evocational field which set limits on Satnampanth. At the same time, Satnampanth followed a path of evocation of symbols which defined its cultural autonomy: Satnampanth interrogated caste by subverting the hegemonic symbolic order and, in specifying its trajectory, effected radical ruptures within the evocational field.

Satnampanth not only drew upon, it also rejected elements of the ritual hierarchy within caste society. Satnampurush had asked Ghasidas to chase out the gods and goddesses from their houses. The gods and goddesses were active members of the cosmic order: they were the

beings who defined and sustained a divine hierarchy. We know of the close connection between divine and social hierarchy within caste society. A person's ritual status is closely tied to his/her access to gods within the divine hierarchy. [56] The matrix was operated by gods and goddesses. The Satnami mythic tradition rejected the devi- devtas (gods and goddesses) who were themselves *murtipujak* (idol worshipping) beings. Ghasidas, in a dramatic move which sought to abolish the marks of a low ritual status, countered the machinations of village gods and goddesses by throwing them into the rubbish heap. Satnampanth had no temples. The members of Satnampanth were to worship Satnam; they were to repeat his name, morning and evening, facing the sun. Moreover, the abolition of the divine hierarchy was accompanied by a rejection of the figure of the priest whose place and function are closely tied to the ritual hierarchy within caste society. Satnampurush and the gurus were established as the mythic figures who displaced the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon; the *bhandari* replaced the priest within Satnampanth. The bhandari, as a nominated representative of the guru in a village, conducted the life-cycle rituals and played a major role in the festivals of the Satnamis. Finally, the rituals and rites of passage within Satnampanth underscored the closeness, the bounded nature, of the Satnamis. In the case of the rite of initiation to Satnampanth, for instance, it was the Satnami panchayat which decided when the ceremony was to be held; the entire Satnami population of the village participated; the rite of initiation was conducted and the final act of incorporation was performed by the bhandari. [57]

Satnampanth drew upon diverse symbolic orders. This was evident in the constitution of Ghasidas as a guru. Similarly, two of its critical defining signs, the *chauka,* a square made with lines of wheat flour, and the *kanthi,* a necklace of wooden beads, were appropriated from Kabirpanth. [58] These symbolic forms were signifiers of difference: the Satnamis were distinct from *shaktas,* the followers of Kali. It needs to be pointed out, in fact, that the abstinence from meat, liquor, tobacco, and certain pulses and vegetables within Satnampanth drew upon both the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution and the pre-existent traditions

of Kabirpanth, and, perhaps, on the Satnami 'movement' ofJagjiwandas in the late eighteenth century in Awadh. [59] The constitution of Satnampanth occurred within a symbolic universe filled with polysemic and multiple referential substances and practices. It followed a process of symbolic construction which drew upon existent hegemonies and traditions and situated the symbolic forms in a new context. [60] The repositioned signs entered into new relationships with each other and pressed new associations within Satnampanth; they reinforced each other as markers which defined the boundary of Satnampanth in relation to other groups.

The symbolic forms defined and sustained Satnampanth as an oppositional order. We saw that Satnampanth worked towards a pure body. The body constitutes a frame of selfhood in individual and collective experience; it provides a constellation of signs which signify the relations of persons to their contexts. The construction of the self and of the universe of social and natural relations of which it is a part are carried out through the body. [61] In the ritual hierarchy of caste society the body of a person is a repository of signs of purity and pollution. These signs constitute the self by defining a person's ritual status within the system of relationships in the caste hierarchy. Moreover, in this system of ritual ranking there is a continuity between the body social and the body personal: the caste, literally as a body, affords and transmits the signs of ritual status embodied by its members. [62]

Satnampanth was the creation of a pure body which, in turn, invested the bodies of its members with signs of ritual purity. The purified and transformed body effected the constitution of a new self of the Satnamis. Satnampanth, through the appropriation and repositioning of the signs and practices of the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution, and the symbolic forms of other traditions, and through the rejection of divine hierarchy and the figure of the priest (which are all closely tied to social hierarchy), interrogated and disrupted the hegemonic symbolic order. The creation of a transformed body and a new self within Satnampanth was, simultaneously, the transformation of an oppressive

world held in place by the dominant symbolic order. At the same time, there were limits to the challenge: the self and the world fashioned by Satnampanth reproduced the significance of old meanings. [63]

Guru Ghasidas, the Gond Raja, *Angrez* Sarkar, and Danteshwari Devi

The establishment of the authority of Ghasidas required him to displace other figures of authority within the social and cosmic order. The classic manner of displacement within a mythic tradition takes the form of a mythic figure totally eclipsing the other mythic figures. [64] In Satnampanth this happened with the village gods and goddesses who were thrown into a rubbish heap. At the same time, the Satnami gurus also effected displacements by demarcating their sphere of authority. The exercise, once again, served to constitute the boundary of Satnampanth. I shall take three instances: Ghasidas' encounters with a Gond raja and *Angrez* sarkar, and his relationship with Danteshwari Devi.

The construction of Satnampanth as a confrontational enterprise which challenged the hegemonic symbolic order and relations of power within Chhattisgarh was followed by attacks by dominant groups. The attacks have been encapsulated into a Satnami myth. Soon after the establishment of Satnampanth, the Gond raja of Sonakhan got the news that a Chamar by the name of Ghasidas was accumulating money and coconuts in his kingdom. The raja perpetrated an injustice and told Ghasidas that he wanted half the money and coconuts as his share. Ghasidas replied that he had only betel leaves and coconuts and no money; he agreed to give a share of the betel leaves and the coconuts if the king desired. The king took half the coconuts and then said, 'I am in debt; help me pay the debt of fifty thousand rupees or I will kill the moneylender.' [65] When the king killed the moneylender Ghasidas knew that *pap* (sin) had entered the place and it would be better for him to move out. On the day of Maghi Puno (the night of the full moon in the month of Magh, February—March) the king sent soldiers to Ghasidas' house. There were a few of Ghasidas' men among the soldiers. It struck

them that they had surrounded the guru's house, but if they were to catch him it would be a grave insult to Satnampanth. They began to sing *bhajans* (devotional songs): all the soldiers became devotees of Ghasidas. The soldiers broke open the door and prepared the way for Ghasidas to escape. Ghasidas reached a village; the villagers started celebrating Maghi Puno; the king of Sonakhan attacked; Ghasidas had to leave. The pattern repeated itself as Ghasidas went from one village to another.

The attacks by the raja of Sonakhan occurred on the day of Maghi Puno and, in fact, were provoked by the celebration of the festival. Maghi Puno had been established as a sacred *tithi* (date) for Satnampanth by Ghasidas. It was a festival of importance, a critical marker in the Satnami calendar. [66] Maghi Puno was implicated in the definition of the boundary of Satnampanth. This underscores the significance of the play of this symbolic form in the representation of attacks on Satnamis. The numerous attacks on Ghasidas at various places on the day of Maghi Puno are, to my mind, an encapsulation, a form of collective remembering, of the attacks on the Satnamis. The exercise served, simultaneously, to strengthen the boundary of Satnampanth. At the same time, there is a subplot in this story; the relationship between Ghasidas and the king of Sonakhan. Ghasidas' response to the king's demand for money and coconuts served to demarcate their respective spheres of authority. Ghasidas said that he had only betel leaves and coconuts and no money. The betel leaves and coconut—offered to the guru by his disciples and an important medium in the rituals and practices of Satnampanth—were comprehensive icons of Ghasidas' authority. Equally, Ghasidas accepted the authority of the king; he agreed to give a share of the betel leaves and the coconuts if the king wanted. The difficulty was that the king was unjust; he had been visited by pap. The soldiers, the instruments of the king's unjust authority, were won over by the just and moral authority of Ghasidas. Ghasidas had, in any case, made up his mind to leave; the soldiers provided him with a way out of a place contaminated by sin. Ghasidas' move from one village to another, all of them celebrating Maghi Puno, was a statement of his authority, of the spread of Satnampanth.

Ghasidas had built a house in Bhandar which he had to abandon because of the attacks by the raja of Sonakhan. After the establishment of British rule he returned to Bhandar. Ghasidas had lived there for ten years when the *angrez raja* (English king) received the news about the guru. Soldiers carrying the orders of Agnew Sahib and Mulki Sahib came from Raipur: Ghasidas had been summoned to the capital. Ghasidas went to the capital sitting in a *doli* (a palanquin). In a characteristic move, the doli reserved for use by upper castes (a signifier of status and rank within the caste hierarchy), had been appropriated by Ghasidas. [67] The act of appropriation was an expropriation of the dominant; upper castes, the expropriators, had been divested of their monopoly over a symbol that was constitutive of their domination. Ghasidas had adequately answered the summons of the sahib.

Ghasidas arrived in Raipur. His authority in the capital was awesome. The news of the guru's capture had travelled all around: tens of thousands of Satnamis reached there. As a result Ghasidas had to sit on a *chaupai* (a small cot), high up on a tree, where he could be visible to all. [68] To see and to be seen by Ghasidas was darshan, a spectacle, which affected thousands of Satnami devotees. The substance of Ghasidas' authority, in the seat of the angrez raja, was transmitted through sight. [69] The *chaprasi* (peon) gave the news of Ghasidas' arrival. The sahib ordered that Ghasidas be called; Ghasidas reached in the evening. The use of language, the particular construction, in the narrative suggests a contrast. There was an immediacy, an urgency, about the order to call Ghasidas; Ghasidas' response was to delay. The delay was deliberate: to wait upon a superior is an aspect of subordination; Ghasidas' act was a reversal and a form of resistance against the colonial regimentation of time. [70] The sahib got the peon to give Ghasidas a *lota* (a small vessel) of *sharbat* (a sweet drink) which contained poison. Ghasidas drank it. Ghasidas' acceptance of the poisoned drink was his acceptance of the sahib's authority and of a challenge. He returned to his *aasan* (seat) on the tree. When the night was over the colonial authorities sent the peon to see whether Ghasidas was alive or dead. They were informed that he was alive. Ghasidas had passed the trial. The sahib called Ghasidas

again: both the sahib and the *memsahib* did *salaam* (saluted him). Ghasidas said Satnam and put both his hands on their heads.

Ghasidas' authority as a guru had been recognized by the angrez sahib. At the same time, the sahib, within the terms of colonial administrative lexicon, considered him a *kachha* (weak) guru who had to be tested further. He wrote down Danteshwari on a piece of paper. The sahib's command was not merely expressed in, it was also shaped by writing; the written form bore the mark and was constitutive of the sahib's command, which was a concrete form of colonial authority. [71] Ghasidas was sent with a chaprasi to Danteshwari Devi (the man-eating tribal goddess to whom human sacrifices were made) in Bastar. It was an eight-day journey to the devi's shrine. After being taken there Ghasidas was put inside the devi's temple and the doors were locked. The devi emerged from water; the doors of the temple opened.

The encounter between Danteshwari and Ghasidas demarcated the separate complementary spheres of authority and the different spaces inhabited by the two mythic figures. Danteshwari lived in water; Ghasidas on land. The goddess addressed Ghasidas as 'Bade' which, in Chhattisgarhi, is a mode of address reserved for the husband's elder brother. In the kinship network of the Satnami cosmic order, the relationship between Ghasidas and Danteshwari was situated on an axis which bound them through mutual avoidance. Danteshwari asked him, 'Why have you come here?' Ghasidas made it clear that he was there because he was obeying the king and asked Danteshwari to eat him. Danteshwari replied that she ate all jatis (castes/communities) except Satnamis; she asked Ghasidas to spread the name of Satnam. Ghasidas pledged that he would not betray Danteshwari: she would not get mas (meat), madira (liquor), the substances she devoured, in Satnampanth. The goddess instructed Ghasidas further that he should give coconut,*pakka bhojan* (food cooked in clarified oil), and *chauka*—substances which carried purity—to his devotees: she will not trouble the beings in his *teerth* (place of pilgrimage). It was the purity of Satnampanth, the avoidance of meat and liquor, which made Danteshwari encourage Ghasidas' endeavour. The space inhabited by

Satnampanth was a teerth, a holy place. The reinforcement of the boundary of this space, through a continuous purification of the body, maintained the distance between Danteshwari and Ghasidas. The maintenance of distance was the mutual acceptance of each other's authority and of the relationship of avoidance which bound Danteshwari Devi and Ghasidas.

Balakdas and the Janeu

Ghasidas had established Satnampanth; after his death—which I discuss later—Balakdas took over from his father. The interrogation of the symbolic order of caste society was accompanied by a critique of the emergent symbolic order of colonial power within the Satnami mythic tradition. The simultaneous movement was first introduced in Ghasidas' encounter with the angrez raja. It is underscored by the myth about Balakdas and the *janeu*.

It was on the day of Ghasidas' *kriya ki roti* (funeral feast) that Balak- das told the Satnamis who had assembled that Ghasidas had appeared in a dream and told him that there was janeu (the sacred thread which is the mark of the twice-born in caste society) in Ravidas' *kul* (lineage). Ghasidas had said, 'I had given them kanthi; you spread the janeu.' There is a complicity between the writing of British administrators and the upper-caste people to whom I talked about the incident: both depict it as an act born of the inordinate vanity of Balakdas. This fits well with, as an instance of, the caste stereotype of the Satnamis as an arrogant people. The Satnami version, on the other hand, emphasizes the continuity with the past. The wearing of the sacred thread by the Satnamis was the last wish of Ghasidas; it was conveyed on the day of the funeral feast/the last life-cycle ritual, of Ghasidas. Ghasidas had played with a continuity in the dream. There was sacred thread in Ravidas' kul; Ghasidas had distributed the kanthi; Balakdas was to honour Ghasidas' word through the spread of the sacred thread. The janeu had become a principle of Satnami faith. The enterprise had the critical support of members of the guru's family and key members within Satnampanth. When they went to Balakdas wearing the janeu the guru was pleased: 'Our kul is fortunate.'

The appropriation of the sacred thread by a low caste is, often, snapped up by the master discourse of Sanskritization. [72] I find several problems with such a strategy. Satnampanth appropriated the signs afforded by the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution and by other popular traditions which had begun as an alternative to the caste system. Second, it rejected and overturned key elements of the divine and social hierarchy within caste society. Finally, the janeu was an addition, an accretion, to the Satnami mythic tradition: a part of a process of symbolic construction which situated the sign in a new context and interrogated the caste system. [73] The concept, it seems to me, is used to produce a pat answer: it tends to circumvent an analysis of the processes and the logic of the symbolic construction of low-caste endeavour. Moreover, placing the Satnami appropriation of the sacred thread within the framework of Sanskritization—agreeing with or providing a critique of the master category—misses the simultaneity of the critique of caste society and the alien British rule within Satnampanth. [74]

The wearing of the sacred thread by the Satnamis, an oppositional step, led to a conflict with the upper castes and brought into play colonial law. [75] The news about the janeu spread from one village to another. The *agyani* (ignorant) Hindus created an organization which resolved to kill Balakdas. At the same time, the Hindus were worried: Balakdas had to be found alone for their plan to succeed. Once, Balakdas was travelling with a few companions. The Hindus initiated a quarrel but could not harm Balakdas. The Satnamis appealed to colonial authorities. There was an enquiry. The Raipur *kutcherry* (court) asked Balakdas if he had distributed the janeu among Satnamis. The guru, of course, did not lie. He won the case. The *haakims* (officials) were given a bribe of a thousand rupees. They arrested five Satnamis who were kept in a *hawalat* (jail). The sarkar, to test the Satnamis and to get more money from the Hindus, went 'against its law' and gave each of them five *bathos* (the katha is a large measure) of grain to grind. The Satnamis said, 'We shall do *Snan Sandhya* (the evening purificatory practice) and then we shall grind.' The Satnamis prepared themselves by defecating

and taking a bath in the evening. They put the grain in the *chakki* in front of soldiers. As soon as they said Satnam and moved the handle, the chakki burst. The peon told the officers that the chakki had broken. The officials thought that the Satnamis had deliberately, as an act of mischief, broken the chakki and ordered that they be given another chakki. In the mean time, the officers called the five Satnamis and in front of the Hindus asked, 'What is your caste?' The answer: 'Satnami: The decision about food and drink was taken by Ghasidas. When he heard about the janeu of Ravidas, Balakdas has made us wear it. Satnam is *sancha* [true/pure], any other name is *asancha* [false/impure]. This is all we know.' In front of the Hindus the officers wrote on small pieces of paper: the papers contained orders: wear the janeu; put on a *tilak*; keep a *choti*. After this the janeu started being worn in many villages.

There are two inextricably linked themes in this story; the truth of Satnam and the legitimacy of the Satnami endeavour; the relationship of the Satnamis with angrez sarkar (colonial authority). It was critical for the Hindus to find Balakdas alone. In Satnami self-perception they are defeated only when there is a division within their ranks or when they are disunited. Balakdas had only a few companions: this was an invitation for the Hindus to attack. The few Satnamis were too many; they were united; Balakdas could not be killed. The Satnamis were loyal subjects. After the quarrel it was they who appealed to the sarkar. In the court it was the straightforward answer of Balakdas—the power of his word which carried the truth of Satnam—that won him the law suit. The government was, however, corruptible; the five Satnamis were jailed because the officials had been bribed. Moreover, the sarkar went against its own law when the Satnamis were given five kathas of grain to grind. The Satnami mythic tradition drew upon a language of law and legality and used it to criticize the sarkar, the power that had created the grammar of the language. The Satnamis, however, obeyed the king's orders. They created the conditions in which Satnam could operate. It was after they had purified themselves that they faced the ordeal of grinding five kathas of grain in the chakki. In popular imagination the chakki—as in the reference to chakki *peesna*—is a symbolic form deeply evocative of subjection within the disciplinary institution of the prison.

The power of Satnam burst the chakki. The sarkar did not recognize what lay behind the breaking of the chakki and it was understood as a deliberate act of Satnami mischief. It was, in fact, after the Satnamis stated in a brief and simple fashion the truth of Satnam that recognition came to the angrez sarkar. The Satnamis had passed the trial. The questioning of the exercise of colonial law combined with the truth, legitimacy and power of Satnam reveals the glimmer of a version of an alternative legality; Satnamis had triumphed over the sarkar which at different points had shown itself to be corrupt and ignorant, unjust and unlawful. At the same time, the Satnami claim over the janeu, tilak and choti—the significata of upper-caste domination—was established through the orders of government officers which were, characteristically, inscribed in writing on small pieces of paper.

Balakdas: A Conqueror

We have, in recent years, had forceful critiques of the Dumontian concept of the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution as the overarching organizing principle, the underlying structural logic, of caste society in South Asia. The emphasis on 'the complex and conjectural foundations of hierarchical relations' and 'several contextually shifting relations of inter-caste relationships apparent in everyday village social life' has focused on the ideological, religious, and cultural character of kingship and the dominant caste. [76] What is at issue is, of course, the question of power in caste society. My emphasis on the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution as one of the defining axes of the hegemonic and dominant symbolic order situates relations of power as central to this evocational field. I would like to suggest, moreover, that the construct of a ritual and religious, cultural and ideological kingship and dominant caste was also a critical axis of the hegemonic symbolic order. We need to remember that the social world of Chhattisgarh was populated by numerous feudatory chiefs. We also have evidence of ritually significant prestations and endowments made by dominant caste groups. The mythic tradition of Satnampanth did not replicate the features of a culturally and ritually significant kingship and dominant caste; it engaged with the construct to fashion the guru as a

figure who possessed some of its attributes and, significantly, was on par with the king. The move, initiated by Ghasidas' encounter with the Gond raja, was consolidated by Balakdas.

In the Satnami mythic tradition Balakdas is cast in the mould of a conqueror. He set up an organizational hierarchy which extended from the guru at the top to *raj mahants, mahants, diwans* and, finally, bhandaris and *sathidars7* [77] The organizational structure of Satnampanth constituted an alternate ritual and symbolic centre of power to kings and dominant caste groups. Balakdas called his men and asked them to get ready to go to villages. The Satnami population had to be acquainted with the key members of the organizational hierarchy. Balakdas was, on the one hand, accompanied by Sarha and Judai, two mythic warriors of Satnampanth, who were adept at using swords and guns, and four thousand other *veers* (warriors), and, on the other, by a thousand sants (holy men). Balakdas put on a tilak and a janeu and, significantly, also tied a *bhala* (spear), *talwar* (sword), *banduk* (gun), and rode on a decorated elephant. The impressive cavalcade moved from one village to another. Satnamis of all villages came in their thousands. The mood was joyous; the Satnamis sang *panthi geet* (songs of Satnampanth). After the guru's darshan they showered Balakdas with gold, silver, and clothes; Balakdas had begun his dramatic conquest.

In the course of his *daura* (tour), Balakdas encountered figures of royal authority. The king of Nandgaon took away a horse and broke the kanthi of a few Satnamis. Balakdas got the news. He made it clear that as a guru he did not fight with anyone. Instead he gave a *shrap* (curse) to the raja: the *gaddi* (throne) of Nandgaon could never have a legitimate heir. The curse has not lifted till this day. The raja of Khairagarh decided to test Balakdas. He had meat put in a *katori* (a small round vessel) which was then covered with a piece of cloth. The king asked Balakdas what the katori contained. Balakdas said that it had pieces of coconut. When the vessel was uncovered the meat had, indeed, turned into coconut. The raja gave Balakdas a *puruskar* (prize) and declared that he was a true guru. The raja then got a letter from the Hindu king of Bilaspur to kill Balakdas. The raja of Khairagarh returned

the letter with the reply, '*maare so mare*' (the one who kills shall be put to death). An order was passed against the killing of Balakdas in the kingdom of Khairagarh. Balakdas was called by the raja of Kawardha, who made the guru sit next to him: on the axis of spatial distance, a measure of dominant and subordinate status, Balakdas had been accorded a position of equality. The raja had heard that Balakdas' body had a *dashavtari chap* (the imprint of the ten incarnations of the god Vishnu) and wanted to see it. Balakdas took off his clothes and showed the *chinha* (signs) on his body. The raja was happy; he performed *vandana* (worship) and gave the guru money from his treasury. The spheres inhabited by the king and Balakdas were complementary: the raja, as the ruler, rewarded Balakdas with money; the king was the supplicant, who performed vandana, before Balakdas, the guru. The literal measure of Balakdas' triumph in Kawardha was his entry into the inner space, the female and feminine domain, of the house of the raja. The raja's sister called him inside and made him her guru. Balakdas' success was spectacular. It was disorder compounded by betrayal which attended the death of Balakdas.

Death: Disruption, Disorder, and Betrayal

The death of a guru was the disruption of the cosmic order of Satnampanth. The critical event occurred in situations of disorder. It was, moreover, characterized by betrayal. Before Ghasidas' death Satnampanth was in a bad way. The Satnamis had forgotten to worship Satnam. Satnampurush had assured Ghasidas that he would take a human *avtar* and sort out the problems of Satnampanth. When Ghasidas' *bahu* (daughter-in-law) became pregnant, he asked his associates within Satnampanth if the child would be a boy or a girl. He was told that it would be a girl. Ghasidas was expecting a boy: the *avtar* of Satnampurush. The prophecy of the birth of a girl meant that he had, once again, to take on the responsibility of Satnampanth. Ghasidas had withdrawn from the world; he had to go into it again.

Ghasidas started building a house. When the workmen ran short of wood for the beams of the roof, Ghasidas gave an order to look for a tree. The only tree to be found was a *bel* under which someone had,

long back, buried a *trishul.* It was an awesome conspiracy of circumstances within the divine and cosmic order. Ghasidas remembered Satnam and struck the tree five times with his *tangiya* (axe). He sat down. Bel and trishul are the marks of Mahadeo (the god Shiva). The bel spread all over Ghasidas' body. The entire body became hot. Ghasidas asked the servants to bring the tree and went home. The guru, racked by pain, had food and went off to sleep. It was after this unfortunate and conspiratorial encounter with Mahadeo within the cosmic order that Balakdas' wife gave birth to a girl. Balakdas and other Satnamis were called at night. Ghasidas told them that Satnampurush had betrayed them: instead of a boy a girl was born. Ghasidas announced, 'I shall go to Satnampurush . . . and ask him that you were going to take avtar, why has the opposite happened?' Ghasidas left his body with the Satnamis for two and a half days during his sojourn to meet Satnampurush. It was another betrayal, at this stage, which established the finality of Ghasidas' death. Balakdas, on discovering that Ghasidas' body was being guarded, had stated that the dead do not return. When Ghasidas came back after two and a half days he found that his last rites had been performed. The guru had to go back to the other world.

It was disorder combined with betrayal which, once again, lay behind the death of Balakdas. In the course of his tour Balakdas reached Bilaspur raj. The raja of Bilaspur, we need to recall, wanted Balakdas dead. To make matters worse Balakdas camped in *mauza* Amara Bandha, which was the heart of enemy territory. The Rajput Kshatriyas held a meeting and passed a resolution: the *shikar* (victim) has come into our house; we should not delay; he must be killed tonight. The night was ominous. It was cold and dark. The full moon of Pus (December—January) had been eclipsed by a cloud cover and torrential rain. The right eyes of Sarha and Judai, the two Satnami warriors, were fluttering. The constellation of stars spoke of a*yudh* (battle) that night. Balakdas and his group were to eat the evening meal at the house of Kariya Chamar. Kariya had taken money from the Kshatriyas; he was on their side. A Satnami had betrayed Satnampanth.

Balakdas tempted fate. He decided not to go to eat and sent off his group. There was only one Satnami with Balakdas in his tent. The Hindus attacked. They could identify Balakdas because he was sitting on a chair wearing gold ornaments. [78] The first blow of the sword hit the chair. The second claimed the life of Kodu Bahiya. In the dim light, from a fire burning outside, the Hindus thought that they had killed Balakdas. The terror of the night was not over. Sarha and Judai were returning after the meal. They took the enemy to be their companions. The warriors were killed. The Hindus, convinced that they had completed their task, were going back when they heard the guru's companions shouting, 'Balakdasji, come this way.' The Hindus started looking for Balakdas. The dark night was suddenly illuminated by a flash of lightning. The Hindus saw Balakdas in his gold ornaments; they asked him who he was; the guru did not lie. A major fight broke out. Balakdas was killed amidst chaos. Horses and elephants left their places and ran, people ran helter-skelter and fought and killed, not recognizing each other. [79] Balakdas in death had lived a belief of Satnampanth: Satnamis can be defeated only when they are disunited.

I end this tale of the construction of Satnampanth as an oppositional symbolic order, a community, with the death of Balakdas. There are other myths, other questions, other tales.

13

Popular Religion and Social Mobility in Colonial Bengal

The Matua Sect and the Namasudras*

SEKHAR BANDYOPADHYAY

Hitherto popular culture had been defined by a process I I of exclusion', writes David Hall in his 'Introduction' to JL JL *Understanding Popular Culture*. [1] Through this exclusionist methodology, as it appears, popular religion came to be regarded as the 'other' religion, defined in contradistinction to what was known as the established religion of the elites, which incorporated a classical tradition. This ascription of a residual character to popular religion is the result of an unconscious acceptance of the contemporary elitist stereotyping of certain sets of beliefs and rituals as 'popular', or not conforming to the religious and moral norms of the elites. Such 'popular' religion is believed to be something which the elites of society did not subscribe to or discarded as being too plebeian or typical of the subordinate classes. This leads to the conception of popular religion in an oppositional form: it is regarded as a religion which developed from among the people and which was constructed in resistance to the ideology of the elites. Such definitions, which assign an independent

identity to popular religion, thus also assume its disjunction from the religion of the elites, discounting possibilities of interaction and mutual interchange of ideas between the two streams. This assumption of an autonomy of popular religion does not however stand the test of scrutiny.

In its 'wider sense', popular religion 'means quite simply the religion of the vast mass of people; popular in the sense of "widely favoured"', and it incorporates also its 'narrower usage', i.e. religion as an 'oppositional form'. [2] And if we look at popular religion from this perspective, we may often find that much of the popular religious beliefs and practices were actually rooted in or derived from what may be described as the religion of the establishment. In a hierarchical society the upper orders extended their hegemony over the rest of the society by prescribing certain moral-ideological standards, which set the limits for imagination of the masses. The latter began to conform, sometimes consciously (though helplessly) and sometimes unknowingly, to those standards, and often internalized them as their own. And therefore we often come across situations which can lead us to doubt the distinction between 'elite' and 'popular' cultures or religions. Although this shaping of popular culture was essentially of an unequal nature and had a class dimension, it was also a two-way process, as the classical religion absorbed elements from folk religions and became 'folklorised'. [3]

But, we cannot take it for granted that popular religion was always, and in all its aspects, conformist in nature. As some historians of popular religion have argued, the people were not always the passive receivers of values of their social superiors; they also adapted or redefined these in their own ways. [4] Through this process of creative appropriation, [5] popular religion developed its subversive edge. It began to question the ideologies of the hegemonic religious order and preached inversion of the social hierarchy which the latter had legitimized. Popular religion in this way reflected the social protest of the subordinate classes against their social superiors and their ideologies of domination. But this subversion or inversion was

transitory and these moments of protest only set the normality into sharper focus. Religion, in other words, had for the people certain functional and emotional utilities. It helped them absorb the shocks and tensions of life, in certain cases also define and assert their self-image, and in so doing provided them with an ideology of protest. But as this selfimage was usually defined within the overall context of the established social milieu, the protest itself became ultimately coopted into the hegemonic order. And it was religion again which legitimized and smoothened this process of accommodation and absorption.

Popular religion, to borrow an expression, was 'at the same time both acculturated and acculturing'; it was neither radically different from the religion of the elites, nor could it be completely moulded by it. It was 'a mixture, whose constituent elements', derived from both folk and classical traditions, 'weld together indissolubly'. [6] The present essay seeks to bring out this complex interaction by analysing the beliefs, rituals, and symbols of the Matua sect which had developed in the late nineteenth century to meet certain social needs of an upwardly mobile peasant community called the Namasudras.

In eastern Bengal, the community had constructed in course of the nineteenth century a new self-image or indeed a new collective 'self', which it had to affirm. This act of self-affirmation both necessitated a subversion of the hegemonic ritual order, as well as accommodation within that system so that the new self-image might be legitimized. The cult was so conceptualized that it could adequately meet both these functional and emotional needs of the community and it therefore became the main focus of their social movement. It also became a major instrument of social mobilization, systematically used to reinforce the collective identity and to draw the social boundaries in sharper lines. But along with this adherence to the tenets of the cult, the Namasudras also participated in a wider range of rituals, rites, and ceremonies that were directly within the constituted order of organized Hinduism. This signified their co-option by the hegemonic social order, which their initial social protest was directed against.

The political behaviour of the Namasudras also followed the same trajectory, largely as a consequence of this socio-religious movement. Initially alienated from the nationalist movement, which was thought to be serving only the interests of a dominating high-caste gentry leadership, they gradually moved towards integration into the larger political nation. Their movement for social regeneration had elevated them by the end of the 1930s to a position of power within the institutionalized politics of Bengal, compelling the Congress, which represented the mainstream nationalism in the province, to recognize this new organized power base. Integration, with an appropriate share of political power, appears to have been the ultimate objective of their leaders, as that alone would legitimize their new respectable self-image, which had been conceptualized not in isolation, but in relation to the other components of what was then the political nation. The organizational network of the Matua sect, by mobilizing mass support in favour of this manoeuvre, helped the leaders of the community to achieve their political goal.

II

The Namasudras, who were earlier known as the 'Chandals' of Bengal, lived mainly in the six eastern districts of the province, i.e. Bakarganj, Faridpur, Dacca, Mymensingh, Jessore, and Khulna, which contained in 1901, 75.18 per cent of this caste group of 1,852,371. Numerically, they constituted the second largest caste group among the Hindus of Bengal, and the largest in its eastern parts. Within eastern Bengal again, their major concentration (about half of the Namasudra population of Bengal) was in the low-lying *bil* or marshy tracts of north-west Bakarganj, south Faridpur and the adjoining Narail and Magura subdivisions of Jessore, and the Sadar and Bagerhat subdivisions of Khulna. [7] In the early-twentieth-century *jatimala* literature the Chandals were portrayed as the 'non-Aryan autochthonous people of the land'. This theory might have been derived from the late-nineteenth-century writings of the colonial ethnographers such as James Wise or Herbert Risley, who believed that the geographical location of the community strongly indicated that they were originally a 'Dravidian

tribe' which had come into contact with the Aryans at a comparatively late age. They were gradually incorporated into the fold of Hinduism and later hardened into a caste. But this Hinduization had possibly taken place when the caste system had already assumed its fully developed shape and the outsiders were being taken in reluctantly and only at the bottom. But this entry into the Hindu fold was in itself a case of upward social mobility, as this placed the community above 'the other non-Aryans like the Bagdi, Dom, Hadi etc.', who, according to the author of *Bangiya Jatimala,* were denied this access into Hindu society till the early decades of the twentieth century. [8]

The Chandal origin of the Namasudra community also explains its social status among the Hindus of Bengal. The Chandals were untouchables according to *Manusmriti* and *Vyasasamhita*. [9] But the *Brahmavaivartapuranam* and the *Brihaddharmapuranam,* the two thirteenth-fourteenth century texts, refer to these Chandals as *antyaja* or a low born mixed caste or *sankarajati,* and do not give any firm indication that they were strictly held to be untouchables. [10] Even Raghunandan, who is regarded as the most conservative *smritikara* of sixteenth-century Bengal, speaks of restrictions on connubial and commensal relations with the Chandals, but does not insist that their touch be avoided by all means. [11] The literary evidence of the *Mangalakavyas* of the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries also suggests that the Chandals lived within the precincts of the town *(Chandala nibasepure)}* [12] and were not regarded as *antebasi* (dwellers on the periphery) as indicated by Manu. Enquiries in the early twentieth century also revealed that the so-called untouchables suffered less in Bengal than their counterparts in other regions of India. [13] The Namasudras, in other words, even if they were the inheritors of the social status of the earlier Chandals, were certainly not the 'untouchables' or Panchama. [14] Nor were they the lowest of the low in Bengali Hindu society. In certain eastern districts like Faridpur, Dacca, or Jessore, they were ranked in popular esteem at the middle of the hierarchy of the *sankarajatis;* in other districts also they were placed above the actual untouchable menial castes of Bengal,

such as Teor, Bagdi, Muchi, Dom, Hadi, Bhuimali, etc. [15] But despite this, the Namasudras were subjected to various forms of social disregard, which created a considerable social distance between them and the privileged high-caste Hindu *bhadralok*. The latter, though they did not actually practise untouchability, often verbally invoked the notion in order to affirm their social authority. [16] And the proliferation of*jatimala* literature in the early twentieth century gave fresh currency to the dicta of *Manusmriti,* as the lower-caste assertiveness was threatening the social harmony which it had once sanctified. [17]

The low social status of the Namasudras also coincided with their subordinate class position. But in course of the nineteenth century the community underwent such a radical transformation that it almost completely changed its own self-perception. In the low- lying *bil* areas of eastern Bengal, which were almost submerged for more than six months in a year, the Namasudras used to maintain an amphibious existence, earning their livelihood through boating and fishing. [18] But the rapid reclamation of these marshy wastes in course of the nineteenth century provided these hardy people with an opportunity to improve their lot as pioneer cultivators. As the frontier of cultivation expanded in eastern Bengal, the Namasudras emerged as a settled peasant community, 78 per cent of the actual earners among them being dependent on agriculture. Of this peasant population, only a small fraction, 1.15 per cent in 1911, were in the rent-receiving category, while the rest were either 'rent payers', i.e. *ryot* with or without occupancy right, or 'field labourers', and 'farm servants'. The latter tilled the soil as sharecroppers or agricultural workers, whose numbers were increasing and whose plight was getting worse towards the 1920s. But the more important fact that requires to be underscored is that landholding in this region was monopolized by the high-caste Hindus and the Sayyid Muslims. In the Dacca, Rajshahi and Chittagong divisions, where the Namasudras mainly lived, 80.82 per cent of the 'rent receivers' belonged to these social categories, while only 3.78 per cent of them were Namasudras. Thus the most fundamental dichotomy in Bengal's agrarian relations, i.e. between the 'rent receivers' and the

'rent payers', coincided with the caste hierarchy. And this division was further accentuated by various forms of oppression, such as subinfeudation, exaction of illegal cesses, non-fixity of rent, and replacement of easy cash rents with heavy produce rents. However, the available evidence also suggests that there was differentiation even within the community, as a small group had moved up the social ladder by taking advantage of the process of reclamation that had been going on in the area since the early nineteenth century. Some of them had also taken to moneylending and trade, and later to education and professions. But a very rough calculation based on census occupation data suggests that this upwardly mobile group constituted even less than 2 per cent of the Namasudra population in 1911. [19]

The situation therefore suggests that the vertical divisions within the community were not sharp enough as yet to destroy its internal cohesion or cause a rift in a commonly shared sense of group identity. The peasantry had already been alienated from the hegemonic highcaste gentry, who oppressed them both in the social and economic spheres of life. The upwardly mobile section, on the other hand, was numerically so small and economically so weak, with such a low ritual rank, that it could not identify itself with the high-caste *bhadralok*. Their newly-acquired secular social status made them more conscious of their paradoxical social position, especially the anomaly involved in their performing roles higher than their traditional caste occupation. By the late nineteenth century, the Namasudras, through a commonly shared physical experience of constantly encountering a hostile nature in the vast marshy or forest tracts of east Bengal, [20] had emerged as a settled peasant community, with an up-and-pushing group to provide it with the necessary leadership. They had by now constructed a collective self-image which was radically different from that of the boating or fishing Chandals, living at the periphery of human settlements.

It is at this juncture that the transition from Chandal to Namasudra identity took place, though it is difficult either to determine the exact meaning of the new term, [21] or to specify the date when the new name actually began to take off. The first organized meeting of the

community for their social upliftment was held in 1881 in village Dattadanga of Mollarhat subdivision of Khulna district. [22] It was possibly around this time that the new name began to gain currency. James Wise, whose ethnological account of eastern Bengal was published in 1883, found this name in social use. [23] The circular which Risley had issued in 1886, for the guidance of the local informants supplying data for his ethnological survey of Bengal, also referred to the community as 'Chandal or Namasudra'. [24] The same expression was later incorporated for the first time into the census report of 1891, indicating wider popular acceptance of the new name. By 1900 it seems to have gained further social recognition and, as local officials reported from eastern Bengal, the members of the community would now strongly 'object to being called Chandals'. [25] The Namasudra identity of the community by now seems to have taken firm roots in the collective consciousness of its members.

The essence of this new collective consciousness of the Namasudras was an ever-growing sense of self-esteem and what contributed to its development was, apart from the physical environment, their contact in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with a number of libertarian social influences. The first major influence that they were exposed to was that of Islam. Its egalitarian social philosophy had lured many of them into its fold. Although it is difficult to quantify the rate of conversion in Bengal, according to an early-twentieth- century Hindu speculation, nearly half of its lower-caste population had embraced Islam during the two and a half centuries of its existence in this region. [26] Later, in the nineteenth century, it was replaced by Christianity as the major proselytizing faith, because in all the Nama- sudra populated areas missionaries of various denominations were most active. What was important, however, was not the conversions that took place, but the spirit of self-respect that such influences instilled in the Namasudras. Indeed, by the late nineteenth century, the Namasudra collective identity had taken a firm shape and they were no longer interested in conversion. Therefore, the Australian Baptist missionary, Dr C.S. Mead, who was most active among the Namasudras of Faridpur,

noted in despair that they had only learnt to 'lift up their heads', but refused to '*bow* their heads in living and lowly homage at His pierced feet'. [27]

What had further inspired the Namasudras was the influence of the medieval *bhakti* movement, particularly its more non-formal and egalitarian rural variants. The movement had been started in Bengal by Sri Chaitanya and his disciples, whose avowed goal was the social and spiritual salvation of the downtrodden. But Vaishnavism could not ultimately escape the influence of the 'great Sanskrit theological and philosophical tradition'. In order to be accepted as authentic, the teachings of Sri Chaitanya had to be related to the Vedic and Upanishadic traditions. This task of 'tying' Bengal Vaishnavism 'into the orthodox traditions of Indian religion' was accomplished by the *sada* or six Goswamins of Vrindavan. [28] But as the disciples of Sri Chaitanya were organized into a sect in Bengal, known as the Gaudiya Vaishnava Sampraday, it developed a syncretism that drew together the earlier liberal trends as well as the later Smarta-Puranic canonical orthodoxy, and it brought in also the Sahajiya tradition which enjoyed a tremendous influence on the lower orders of the society. Thus Gaudiya Vaishnavism gradually turned into an institution through which lower-caste people developed a new sense of self-respect and also began to assert it in larger social spheres. [29] But as Chaitanya himself had left the caste question open, 'at least in the social sense', his later followers, in the absence of any consistent model to follow, also took various positions. While Nityananda and his followers, many of whom had Sahajiya leanings, continued to assist the lower castes and the untouchables, the more orthodox section, led by the Shantipuri Brahman, Advaita Acharya and his followers, refused to admit such elements into their sect. [30] Gradually, this orthodox trend became dominant, as the Brahman gurus, scared by the threat to their authority posed by the ever-increasing number of lower-caste converts, began to introduce caste rules and codes of differentiation. The Brahman devotees were allowed to enjoy all sorts of ritualistic privileges, while the untouchables were despised as Jat Vaishnava. [31] The sect's previous

image of protest and irreverence was submerged in established orthodoxy and uninhibited appropriation of symbols of order, discretion, and domination. An early-twentieth-century oral tradition from the Bengal countryside bears ample testimony to this new aristocratic spirit of differentiation among the Vaishnavas:

Neda nedi sabai bujhi? Emni matibhram,
Vaishnavero uchunichu achhe bhedkram? [32]

They are all tonsured males and females, you think? That is an error; distinctions between high and low exist among the Vaishnavas too.

As organized Vaishnavism developed its image of a 'neo-Brahman order', promoting 'social cohesion' rather than 'social revolution', [33] the more radical Sahajiya tradition which, true to its Tantrik heritage, had repudiated the caste system, [34] began to grow in popularity. Together with this, there developed a number of 'deviant' sects, mostly under non-Brahman gurus, who disavowed all established norms of caste distinction and deference. These Sudra gurus, who had no formal link with the orthodox Gaudiya Vaishnava order, began to attract thousands of lower-caste devotees who flocked to them in search of social emancipation. [35] When in the late nineteenth century Risley found the majority of the Namasudras 'profess[ing] the tenets of the Vaishnava sect of Hindus', [36] it was actually the various deviant sects that they belonged to, e.g. the Kartabhaja, a deistical sect which repudiated idolatry and caste and established remarkable influence over the Namasudras living in the swamp areas of Faridpur and north-west Bakarganj. [37] Another sect which also appears to have attracted these people in the Bikrampur region was the Kishori Bhajan Sampraday which, initiated by a man called Kalachand Vidyalankar, made no distinction between castes. [38]

Another major influence on the Namasudras was that of the sect which had developed around Shahlal Pir. Born sometime around 1700 in rural east Bengal, Shahlal had gathered around him both Muslim and numerous Hindu disciples. The majority of the latter were Namasudras,

drawn from the villages of Dacca, Faridpur, Bakarganj, etc. After his death in *c.* 1805, the sect developed further under his three sons. What the Pir had preached was a simple gospel of personal devotion (*bhakti*) and spiritual emotionalism (*bhava*) and the disciples were admitted into the sect through a simple ritual of initiation. This insistence on initiation appears to be in itself an attempt to undermine the significance of birth, which was of utmost importance in organized Hinduism. The hierarchy of castes was further challenged by the acceptance of the primacy of the guru or *murshid* by the disciples. The guru was to be the centre of their devotion and he would act as the intermediary between them and their God. This devotion had to be unconditional, as everyone, the Hindu disciples included, had to visit the Pir's *darga,* accept his *sinni* and drink water touched by his feet. In this way, as a *murshida* song indicated, the disciples had to renounce their pride of caste and lineage *('tor bazare aisyare amar gelo jati kulre'),* in order to propitiate the guru to attain divine joy. As the modern chronicler of the sect describes them, the *murshida* songs, which are sung even today among the Namasudras of eastern Bengal, are those which sang of the glory of humanity. [39] Their dictum *'murshid satya'* (truth is the preceptor) was later adopted by another sect known as the Darbesh Sai Sampraday, which was formed in the Dacca region in the mid-nineteenth century by a man called Udaychand Karmakar. All these local heretical sects had a profound influence on the Namasudras. But as these sects sought to obliterate social distinctions of caste, they were stereotyped as plebeian. Their rituals and philosophical constructions were thought to be 'totally antithetical to Gaudiya Vaishnava dharma.' [40] To this genre belonged the Matua sect, and by the turn of the century most of the Namasudras of east Bengal were the members of this order.

III

Multiple factors in the nineteenth century had contributed to the evolution of a new collective identity among the Namasudras and they now sought to assert it by breaking down the barriers of deference, which meant implicitly an attempt to subvert the hegemonic ritual

order. Their first organized endeavour at self-affirmation came in 1872 in the Faridpur-Bakarganj region. [41] It was, in the words of the Faridur District Superintendent of Police, 'an effort . . . to raise themselves in the social scale among the Hindus.' [42] The occasion was the *sradh* ceremony of the father of a well-to-do Namasudra headman of village Amgram in Bakarganj district. Violating established norms of commensality, he invited his higher-caste neighbours to attend the ceremony and dine in his house; but the latter, at the instigation of the Kayasthas, refused to accept his invitation. This sparked off a social boycott movement, as the Namasudras over a wide region, covering south Faridpur, north-west Bakarganj and the adjoining areas of Jessore, immediately resolved not to work under the higher castes who denied them social respect. So effective was the movement that about four months after its commencement the District Magistrate of Faridpur found the fields untilled, the houses unthatched and not a single Namasudra in the service of the Hindus, and interestingly also of the Muslims, of the region. Extra police had to be mobilized from the district headquarters to maintain peace and order. But the movement soon died down, as the poorer Namasudras found it difficult to sustain themselves without work. And in this way their first attempt to restructure the power relations in society ended in a failure.

This initial setback impressed upon the Namasudras the necessity of a more effective social organization that would both bind them together and give them the self-confidence to assert themselves as a unified group against the hegemonic elites of the local Hindu society. This emotional need of the community explains the growing popularity of the Matua sect, which emerged and spread among the Namasudras of Faridpur almost around the same time. The sect was formed by a man called Harichand, who was born in a Chandal or Namasudra family in 1811/1812 in a village called Safaladanga in the Gopalganj subdivision of Faridpur district. [43] He and his family had been Vaishnavites for generations. His grandfather Mochanram was a devout Vaishnava and was known in his locality as Thakur Mochanram. Mochanram's eldest son Jasomanta was a Vaishnava devotee as well, and he inherited the

title of 'Thakur'. He was a man of modest means, with two or three milch cows, and the milk products which he personally sold in the market, added to his income. His son Harichand was evicted from his ancestral village through the machinations of the zamindar and had to settle ultimately in Orakandi village, where he took to cultivation and small trade for a living. But already known as a religious person endowed with magical healing powers, he soon began to attract disciples from his own village as well as from the neighbouring villages of Ghritakandi, Machkandi, Kumaria, Chandradwip, and Orakandi. As his gathering increased, one day he experienced *atma darshan* or self-revelation, through which he realized that he was the incarnation of God himself, born in this world to bring salvation to the downtrodden. Immediately after this he started organizing his own sect on the basis of a simple non- ritualistic doctrine of *bhakti:* 'all rituals, except devotion to God, faith in mankind, and love for living creatures, are distortions.' [44] The simple dictum had an obvious appeal for the lower orders of the society. More and more of them flocked around him. Gripped by emotion, they sang collectively the enchanted name of 'Hari' or Lord Krishna. This had obvious implications for the existing hierarchy in local society. People began to believe that Harichand was gifted with supernatural power, not only to cure a disease, to give life to the dead or to tame a tiger, but to punish the social offenders as well: he could overthrow an oppressive Brahman landlord or curse a cruel *naib* with leprosy. [45] But, as the sect tended to subvert the hegemonic order, the upholders tried to deter them, at first by means of physical coercion (with the help of the zamindar), and then by resorting to social boycott. The upper-caste Hindus and the respectable Vaishnavas refused to have any social interaction with the followers of the sect. Yet another tactic of the opponents was to ridicule them as *moto* or people drunk with their own spiritual outpourings *(matoyara).* In order to vindicate the image of his sect, Harichand turned the ridiculous epithet into the new name of his followers, and he started calling them 'Matua'. The word, however, had no definite dictionary meaning. [46]

The sect gradually grew in size as it became the rallying point for the members of the untouchable and lower castes of the region, the Namasudras, of course, constituting an overwhelming majority of them. [47] Harichand died in 1878, but the sect expanded further under his son Guruchand Thakur (b. 1846). [48] The latter formalized the doctrines of the sect to suit the needs of an emerging lower-caste peasant community. Though claims were put forth that it was a 'new' religion, [49] its philosophical notions, its general view of life and society, and its cosmology were constructed through a selective absorption and/or inversion of ideas and symbols from traditional orthodox Hinduism and the Bhakti tradition, incorporating both the canonical and Sahajiya variants of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. But the sect would not have been so popular had it not posed a challenge to the hegemonic ritual order and sought to negate its ideology of hierarchy. Harichand was portrayed as the person who had destroyed the pride of the Kshatriya and brought the Brahman and the Chandal together on a platform of equality. [50] His son Guruchand also visualized a society where there would be no differentiation among human beings ('*manushe manushe balo bhinno jati kotha'); particularly among the members of the Matua sect there was to be no division of caste *('matua sakale ek jatibhed* nai'). [51] Food and water could be had from the hands of any individual who had a 'pure character', as no other social distinction was recognized. Since the human body was the abode of the Supreme God, there could be no reason why it should be regarded as impure or untouchable. [52] This humanitarian faith impelled the disciples of Harichand to abolish all distinctions amongst themselves ('*Harichander anuchar hayechhe nana varna* ekanna'). [53] Even gender distinctions were done away with, as women were accepted as social equals and were granted equal rights in the congregational life of the sect. [54] And though initially focused on a single community (i.e. the Namasudras), it gradually attracted members from other sections of the society including, as it appears from a devotional song, some of the upper castes as well:

Brahman Chandal Tanti Jola Muchi Hadi jatigo
Sab milechhe balchhe Hari go. [55]

Brahman, Chandal, Tanti, Jola, Muchi, Hadi castes have all united and are chanting the name of Hari.

Guruchand believed that though born in a Namasudra family, he could not deliver his own community unless he worked for the salvation of all other social groups, especially the depressed and the untouchable. [56] This gradually developed into a universalist approach, which indicates his awareness of the outer world and of the new humanism popularized by the Bengal Renaissance. Guruchand, as his biographer tells us, had once told the wife of an Australian Baptist missionary:

Narakare bhoomandale jatajan achhe,
Ekjati bole manyapabe mor kachhe. [57]

All human beings living in this world will be considered by me as belonging to one race.

Nothing could be more expressive of the universal egalitarianism of the Matuas. It was this humanistic approach of the sect that made it so popular among the lower orders of the society. Yet, in reality, this universalism does not appear to have been pushed very far and the sect, despite big claims, remained more or less coterminous with the Namasudra community. But this, on the other hand, gave the sect more homogeneity which the other religious orders lacked.

Another reason why the depressed Namasudra community felt attracted to this sect was that it challenged openly the hegemony of the Brahmans, who were the pivot of the local power structure. One of the methods of perpetuating this hegemony was *gurubad.* The guru enjoyed total control over the spiritual life of his disciples by acting as the intermediary between them and God. The position of the guru was the prerogative of the Brahmans, as they enjoyed a monopoly over scriptural knowledge and an exclusive right to perform Vedic rites. The Brahman guru therefore came to be looked upon as the only person who could initiate (known as *diksha)* others into the path of spiritual

salvation. As a Brahman commentator put it in the early twentieth century:

> *Guruh pita gururrnata gururdeva gururgatih,*
> *Sive rushtegurustrata gurou rushte na kaschana.* [58]
>
> Guru is father, mother and God and the only person to be followed. If Siva is angry, the guru can protect, but if the guru is angry nobody can.

The concept, in other words, required a total subjection of the disciples to their guru and this concept was incorporated into the orthodox Vaishnava theology. As Sanatana Goswami says in his *Haribhaktibilasha:* 'Pay obeisance to your guru and surrender everything at his feet and after being initiated by him in a proper way, learn from him the sacred Vaishnava mantra.' [59] It was again the same text which stressed that the Brahman gurus should enjoy the most exalted position within the Vaishnava order. Therefore, when the Sudra gurus began to initiate their disciples, it was considered as a deviation and they came to form what are known as 'deviant' orders. The supremacy of the guru was further emphasized in the other *bhakti* texts, which gradually began to make a distinction between the Sravanaguru or Sikshaguru, i.e. preceptors who preached or taught *bhakti*, and the Dikshaguru who initiated the disciples into the path of devotion by giving them the sacred mantra or 'syllable'. As time passed, the Dikshaguru assumed the status of God and the 'intermediacy of the guru became an essential concept of *bhakti*.' [60]

Both Harichand and his son Guruchand of the Matua sect repudiated this essentialism of intermediacy. Harichand had insisted that there was no need for initiation, nor even for pilgrimage *('diksha nai karibena teerthaparjatan)* and the only means to achieve salvation was through simple devotion and love for God *i^Hariprem plabanete jib mukti pabe'),* for which no mediation of any businessman-like guru *('Gururupe byabasayi)* was necessary. [61] Guruchand also thought that although the guru chanted the sacred mantra into the ear of the disciple, all other mantras except the name of God or Harinam were

meaningless *(dikshamantra dey guru karne mukh rakhi/Harinam mantra bina sab mantraphanki),* [62] and to learn this supreme syllable or *mahamantra,* no initiation or dispensation was necessary (‘*diksha-siksha kono kichhu nahi prayojan/Harinam mahamantra jano sarbajan*). [63] But though the role of the Brahman Dikshaguru was denounced, both Harichand and Guruchand themselves gradually assumed among the devotees of the Matua sect, the status of Sravanaguru or Sikshaguru. This development, amounting almost to their deification, becomes evident from a number of the later devotional songs of the sect. [64]

The Matua sect did not, however, advocate idolatry and ritualistic Hindu practices and condemned them as instruments of Brahman domination. The deities of the Hindu pantheon, Guruchand believed, were the creation of the scriptures written by the Brahmans and the sole purpose of those scriptures was to establish the supremacy of the Brahmans in society. To save the masses from the evils of priestcraft, Guruchand denounced all rituals as puzzling mumbo-jumbo (‘tantra-*mantra-bhelki-bhoj*’), [65] which the Brahmans had devised to deny the people an understanding of the real meaning of religion. He wanted, as we learn from his biographer, a simple religion that would provide guidance to the common people for living a meaningful life *(‘Je dharma sahajpathe/Chalay jiban pathe/Sei dharma sarbajana* gamya’). [66] The devotees of the Matua order did not worship any gods or goddesses (‘Matua *jibane tai debdebi keho* nai’). Their only deity was He who lived in the hearts of men (‘*manusher majhe tarpraner thakur)* and their mantra the love that linked the devotee to the deity (‘niti *niti tana tani chaleprane*prane’). [67] If there was at all any prescribed ritual for the Matua sect, it was to pay regular obeisance at the altar of Lord Hari, and to sing collectively the songs of devotion or *kirtan* to attain the mystical joy that would lead them to their salvation. [68] However, as the sect developed, the Lord Hari, and Hari the first preceptor, became virtually identical in the songs composed by the later devotees, and subsequently Guruchand was also elevated to the status of a deity. [69] This was not

perhaps unexpected, as popular devotion often requires some concrete manifestation of divinity as its object.

The *kirtan* was an essential feature of Matua religious life and it performed several important social functions. As it was sung collectively, it gave the sect a congregational character and helped its predominantly Namasudra devotees to construct and continually reinforce their collective identity through a shared experience of devotion. This form of congregational singing had a long tradition in Bengal, as an authority on this socio-religious phenomenon tells us. [70] It had existed even before Sri Chaitanya had popularized it in the sixteenth century, though in the post-Chaitanya period it became much more widely practised. As people high and low gathered in assemblies, they sang and danced together, and all social distinctions were forgotten. The *kirtan,* in other words, had a great levelling effect and was not therefore liked by the orthodox custodians of social hierarchy. It also fostered among the participants a sense of co-operation and camaraderie, and thus gave them a sense of selfconfidence. At times of calamity, people in the Bengal countryside frequently resorted to this practice of singing *kirtan,* as it gave them the courage to face difficult times and to do so collectively. It was likewise for the Namasudra devotees of the Matua sect. The songs *(namgan,* as they were popularly called) emphasized, first of all, the power of the gurus, both Harichand and Guruchand, who could help their disciples to overcome all the crises of their lives. The gurus could expel the fear of the king and ward off all hazards (‘*rajbhay nasila bighna* binasila’); [71] they could give solace to all sorrows (*‘duhkha nibaran')* and give life to the dead (‘mara *dehepran dile* bhagaban’); [72] by propitiating Guruchand the hungry could get food and the childless could get a son *(‘annahine pabi anna, putrahineputra* pabi’); [73] by the grace of Harichand, the lame could dance, the blind could see and the dumb could sing the songs of Hari (‘*Namergune khanje nache duti bahu tule/Bobay bale balo haribol andhe chay nayan* mele’); [74] the sheer magic of Harinam cured all diseases of mind and body (‘*Hariname sarbbabyaahi hare’)7* [75]The songs in this way sought to generate self-confidence in the minds of those who were

otherwise weak and ill-equipped to face these hazards and obstacles. It was *namgan* which also gave them courage and selfrespect and the strength to stand up to the powerful adversaries who held them down in society. The congregational singing of *namgan* was, for the Namasudra devotees of the Matua sect, a political ritual to assert their collective will. It would construct a new self and that would controvert the established cosmologies of power in the local society. The *namgan,* in other words, were songs of self-assertion for boosting the collective ego of an upwardly mobile community:

Bhara buke khola chule, jay Harichand bole,

Danda dekhi Matua santan,

Dam dam maro danka, chhindephelo sab shanka Maha byome uda re nishan.

Bhabna ar karishki, benche theke maris ki?

Bado hoye hali hataman,

Jago, jago, jago bir, soja kore rakho sir,

Jak jan benche thak man.' [76]

> The devotees of Matua, with bare chests and loose hair, stand to hail Harichand. Beat your drums, get rid of all your fears and hoist your flag up in the sky. What are you thinking of? Do you want to behave like dead people, while you are still alive? Though you are great, you have been denied honour. So awake, O brave men. Hold your heads high, do not give up self-respect, even though you have to sacrifice your life.

The tenets of the Matua sect were thus constructed to suit the needs of a lowly, self-assertive peasant community and for this reason its ideology was also deliberately given an oppositional form. It was meant to oppose the Shankarite Vedantism which was considered to be the quintessence of the Brahmanya dharma, devised to keep the toiling Sudras in a perpetual state of subordination. Vedantism was the monistic philosophy of spiritual salvation. While the world was regarded as an illusion, salvation meant getting out of the illusory

worldly bondages and attaining the supreme truth, or Brahma, who eluded embodiment. The Bhakti tradition, on the other hand, was against this philosophy of monism; it opposed the concept of an illusory world, and desirability of spiritual salvation in the other world. In this tradition, the world was true and represented variegated manifestations of the supreme being, who claimed the loving devotion of the mortal beings. [77] Harichand developed this difference in perspectives into a position of opposition. He believed that Vedantism inculcated a theory of despair; by advocating renunciation of worldly desires, it deliberately demotivated the working people, and mentally conditioned them into accepting their subordinate position in society, while contemplating salvation in the other world. [78] At a period when Ramakrishna Paramahamsa was popularizing Vedantism among middle-class upper-caste Bengalis, Harichand preached the hollowness of the quest for spiritual salvation (‘*muktispriha sunya nai sadhan bhajan)* and advised his disciples to go in quest of a proper livelihood *(Grihasther mul bhitti arthaniti bate/Banijye basate Lakshmi ei bani rate*). [79] Guruchand attacked the doctrine of renunciation in sharper terms: those whose major concern was how to procure food could not, he thought, afford to waste time in pursuit of spiritual abstractions *ijkemanepalibe dharma anna chinta jar’).* [80] For the hungry, food was God and their major duty was to seek the favour of this supreme God or Annabrahma. [81] They must also propitiate the Goddess of wealth, for wealth was the source of all power and those who were favoured by Lakshmi, received the favour of Narayana as well (‘*Arthe jano mahasakti Lakshmir bahan/Jatha Lakshmi tar kachhe achhe Narayan).* [82] But their quest for wealth must not be through unscrupulous means or lead to unbounded greed. The ideal path was to combine *bhakti* with *karma,* or spiritual devotion with material action. The dictum of *hate kam mukhe nam* (doing worldly duties while chanting His holy name), [83] as Harichand had defined it, became the guiding principle of the Matua philosophy of life. The sect, unlike others of its genre, thus inculcated a work ethic, which was necessary to motivate an upwardly mobile community still cowed down by servitude.

The majority of this community depended on agriculture and the primary unit in the organization of agricultural production was the family. Hence the Matua sect attached utmost importance to the orderly maintenance of family life in keeping with the values of a settled agricultural society, and advised its disciples to perform the duties of a householder or *grahasthya dharma*. [84] The sect did not preach asceticism ('*sanyasir dharma jaha, eidharma nahe* taha'), [85] nor did it prescribe *brahmacharya* or continence in the sense of a complete withholding of semen. [86] Guruchand, in contrast to what Ramakrishna was preaching to his middle-class householder disciples, did not consider '*kamini-kanchan* or women and wealth, as obstacles in the path of *bhakti,* nor did he consider women as gateways to hell ('naraker dwar'). [87] On the contrary, women were regarded as equal partners in family life, essential to men for reproduction, as soil was important to peasants for continuing the cycle of agricultural production. [88] But this did not mean unbridled sexuality, as the householder was also expected to generate in himself the qualities of an ascetic. The ideal man was he who could control his sexuality. Looking at him was akin to going on a pilgrimage ('Deher *indriya bas karechhe je jan/Tanr darsane sab teertha darsan*). [89] The proper performance of familial duties required a combination of two qualities or *guna,* i.e. *raja* and *sattwa:* the former motivated people to work, while the latter elevated them above worldly desires. [90] The flag of the Matua sect therefore contains two colours: it is red with a white border—red representing the *raja* and the white standing for the *sattwa* qualities. [91]

Family life which was so stressed upon in Matua philosophy was thus to be regulated in accordance with strict sexual discipline—chastity of women and restrained sexual behaviour of men were virtues repeatedly extolled in the preachings of the gurus. [92] The classical Bhakti tradition never allowed licentious behaviour in the name of religion and the lower-caste Jai Vaishnava devotees were looked down upon on account of their promiscuity. They were stigmatized for their extramarital affairs, and the ever-increasing number of illegitimate children swelling

their ranks. [93] The various 'deviant' orders, which attracted the largest number of such lower-caste devotees, were stereotyped as assemblies of low-born sensual people flocking together for indulging in immoral sexual activities. [94] The freedom of sexual behaviour, which supposedly characterized social relations at the lower stratum of the society, were condemned on the ground that they did not conform to the moral standards of the orthodox upper-caste society. The elite culture often tried to transform or suppress many aspects of common behaviour, in an attempt to sponsor a 'popular' or mass culture which would conform to the social ethic of the higher orders. And popular religions, in spite of their initial irreverent tendencies, often ended by providing theological legitimization of such elitist reformation of the manners and behaviour of the people.

The Matua sect also performed the same social role, though it did so to fulfil certain specific needs of the community which constituted its primary clientele. The Namasudras during their earlier phase of amphibious existence, were known for their 'partiality for spirits and swine's [sic] flesh', [95] as also for a perceived slackness in maintaining sexual discipline, which upper-caste society often condemned as lack of morality and manners. [96] The difference in norms was, in all probability, partly due to the physical environment, which does not appear to have been very congenial to the maintenance of well-defined and tightly-structured kinship relations. Partly, it might have been also the legacy of a permissive free-mixing tribal culture. But as these people were gradually transformed into a settled agricultural community and were drawn into the main body of Hindu society, its leaders felt a compulsion to conform to the accepted norms of moral behaviour, prescribed for the higher castes of that society. This conformity was necessary for the legitimization of their new social status, i.e. in order to be accepted into Hindu society and to be regarded as respectable by fellow Hindus. The Matua sect, therefore, attempted at a reformation of the manners of the Namasudras at a mass level, and thus also tried to avoid the stigma attached to the other 'deviant' orders. Since, within the orthodox normative system, marriage was regarded as the only

legitimate outlet for human sexuality and sex outside wedlock was looked at as adultery and therefore immoral *('swadareshu ratischaiba paradara bisarjanam)* , [97] Harichand advised his disciples to enter into family life only in association with duly wedded wives and to regard other women as mothers. [98] Guruchand also instructed the Matua devotees to refrain from adultery, as this would bring infamy to their community. [99] The model of proper sexual relationship and behaviour was also popularized through the later devotional songs of the sect:

> *Nari karo pati sar, pati chhada chhusne ar . . .*
> *Paranari matrisama, nare mono e niyam . . .* [100]
>
> Women! consider your husbands to be everything in your lives. Do not *any more* touch other persons except your husbands. . . . Men! remember the dictum that all women other than your wives are like your mothers . . .

The song clearly indicates the earlier freedom in the man—woman relationship and the subsequent transition to disciplined sexual behaviour. As the community shifted from floating boats to homestead lands, began to acquire occupancy right over reclaimed cultivable fields, accumulated property, and enjoyed rights of inheritance, there arose a need for more strictly structured families and social discipline. And this practical need was philosophized, as the devotional songs of the sect portrayed uncontrolled sexual desire as the greatest of the six enemies (vices or *ripu)* of mankind. [101] Ideal love, it was emphasized, was that which was devoid of sexual passion, and that was love for Hari, which filled the mind with divine and endless joy. [102]

As the songs of the Matua sect composed at a later period indicate, this attempt at enforcement of public morality was associated with a conceptualization of the type of family structured according to the notions of patriarchy. In the traditional Hindu extended families, relations were classified according to age, generation, and gender into a hierarchical structure of obedience, with the lowest position, in terms of rights and resources, being occupied by women, who were expected to

obey their husbands. [103] Such notions of hierarchy in family relations were derived no doubt from the ideology of hierarchy that determined the broader Hindu social structure, which the Matua sect had sought to defy. Yet, gradually the same notions began to influence Matua perceptions and they began to visualize families where elders or *gurujan* enjoyed the position of privilege, while women were expected to serve others and obey their husbands. [104] The ideal chaste woman was she who worshipped the feet of her husband *(sati nari bhabe je jan, puja kare patir charan),* and for her no other form of worship was necessary to attain salvation *(meyer sadhan bhajan nai. . . thakte swami barttamane*). [105] This is quite in contrast to the early liberalism of the sect which had once allowed women equal rights to participate in its congregational religious life. And not only that, women also came to be regarded as obstacles in the path of spiritual salvation, [106] a stereotype which Guruchand had once denounced so severely as an upper-caste Vedantic distortion. As the Namasudra disciples moved up on the social scale, or aspired to do so, they felt compelled to adopt the orthodox norms of gender relations and the structures of their families also had to look like those of upper-caste Hindus, who were their point of reference for such compulsive remodelling of cultural group behaviour. But as a result, women lost their freedom and also perhaps respect, which the Matua sect had once promised them.

Such conformism or selective absorption of symbols or ideas from the elite culture or established philosophical traditions was observable in many other aspects of later Matua life. The first and foremost example of this was the acceptance of the theory of incarnation. Harichand, as many of the devotional songs of the sect indicate, was believed to have been the incarnation of Hari or Krishna. [107] As legend would have it, Harichand wished to entrust to Lord Siva his unfinished task of bringing salvation to lower-caste people. The latter listened to his prayer, and so Siva was born in his family as Harichand's son. Immediately after Harichand died, his soul entered the body of Guruchand, who thus became the dual incarnation, combining in himself both the devotion and love of Hari or Krishna and the energy

and prowess of Hara or Siva. [108] The concept appears to have been derived from the orthodox Vaishnava tradition, for Jiva Goswami's *Bhaktisandarbha* makes it clear that only the avataras of Krishna could become the objects of the disciples' devotion and that Siva should be worshipped as well, since he was intrinsically a Vaishnava. [109] Paradoxically, the canonical formulations of the Goswamins of Vrindavan had thus set the limits for their critics' imagination, even though they wanted to build up what were popularly conceived as 'deviant' orders. But the adaptation, in this case, was considered to be essential, for the gurus believed that their followers, in order to assert themselves, needed both the gospels of *bhakti* (devotion) and *karma* (action). Moreover, the adoption of familiar cosmological concepts made the sect acceptable to the common people; radically different or revolutionary concepts might not have been so popular, as people usually are not so easily attracted to innovations.

In a similar way, and perhaps for similar reasons, *gurubad* was also incorporated into the belief system of the Matua sect. Not only were the first preceptors deified, as we have already noted, but their early disciples, who were instrumental in the wider dissemination of their ideas, were believed to have also shared their supernatural powers. The Matua literature repeatedly emphasizes that the early organizers of the sect, men like Gopal Sadhu, Nabagosain, Gosain Tarakchand, Hiraman Gosain, Lochan Gosain, etc. were not gurus, but devotees themselves. [110] But the way in which their glories have been sung in numerous devotional songs of the sect leaves little doubt that they too had assumed the position of Sravanaguru or Sikshaguru, if not Dikshaguru. [111] Even the latter concept, particularly the notion that the intermediacy of guru was essential for spiritual salvation, appears to have gained greater acceptance as some of the lines of these songs quoted below indicate.

1. *Guru gosainr daya habe, karmabandhan jabe ghuche.*

If the *guru gosain* is kind enough, earthly bondage will disappear.

2. *Jadi jabi opar, kar Sriguru kandari, Harinamer tari.*

If you want to sail across to the other world, make *Harinam* your boat and accept the guru as the boatman.

3. *Srigurur bakya dharo, anitya tarka chhado, Edeha sukshma karo, jabe bhabe chinte.*

Have faith in the words of the *guru* and do not indulge in argumentation.

Concentrate on your finer body [i.e. soul] and your worldly worries will vanish. [112]

The lines quoted above do not merely emphasize the spiritual supremacy of the guru, but also indicate that the concepts of an illusory world and the primacy of the goal of salvation in the other world, which both Harichand and Guruchand were so averse to, had gained currency among their later disciples. In the collection of Matua songs, there are numerous examples which imply that the theory of *maya* and renunciation of worldly pleasures or *kamini-kanchan* (women and wealth) had been internalized by the followers of the Matua sect during a later period.

1. *Miche mayar akinchane, majiye kamini-kanchane;*
Ami apni jwalepapagune, apan prane dagdha hoi.

Lured by women and wealth, which are trivial and illusory, I have burnt myself in the fire of sin; it burns my heart.

2. *Ami bhaber abhajan, na jani tomari sadtian,*
Mayarase matta hoye karechi bishay bish grahan.

I am an unfortunate person in this world; I do not know how to propitiate you. Duped by *maya,* I have taken the poison called material wealth.

3. *Kamini kuhak rase, magna hoye achi bose,*
Sadhan bhajan habe kise, bhulechi may ay.

I have succumbed to the mysterious charms of women. I do not know how I shall undertake my spiritual duties, as I have been bemused by *maya.*

4. *Miche rajat kanchan, e dhana jauban,*
Gururpade samarpan kariba ekhan.

Wealth and youth are all false; I shall now surrender everything at the feet of the guru. [113]

The absorption of philosophical notions from the established or orthodox religious order was symptomatic of the Matuas' inability to escape the dominant cultural influence. This was not unexpected, as the Namasudra devotees of the sect had no wish to live in social isolation. On the contrary, the major objective of the community was to seek integration into the constituted social structure and this necessitated absorption of the dominant cultural values of that society. Although the Matua sect sought to subvert the caste hierarchy, the Namasudras could not escape the pervasive influence of caste ideology. In the late 1880s, Risley had found them to be 'very particular as regards caste prejudices', never allowing 'a European to stand or walk over their cooking place'. [114] Later, as their movement gained momentum, they began to demand a higher position within the ritual hierarchy itself and referred to their Brahman origin, tracing their ancestry from the ancient Brahman sage Kashyap. [115] In the first Namasudra meeting in 1881, Guruchand himself, in his presidential address, had spoken about the Brahman origin of his caste. [116] The origin myth that was later constructed to authenticate this claim to Brahman status was derived directly from *Manusmriti}* [117] as otherwise it would not convince the orthodox society. Later these notions were spread through devotional songs, [118] and *jatra* (folk theatre), [119] as dramatical forms of expression were expected to have a greater impact on the popular mind. The Namasudra followers of the Matua sect were, in other words, simultaneously trying to negate the caste ideology of hierarchy, and seeking accommodation within the same ritual structure. Thus rebellion and conformism went hand in hand, the latter tendency being as powerful as the former. In the subsequent myths of the sect, Harichand appeared as a Brahman who had lost his caste by marrying a Namasudra woman. [120] This is an evidence par excellence of conformism, the Brahman being considered

as the highest being and the woman being stereotyped as a defiling agent. These were the very notions which had been emphasized repeatedly in the *puranas* and by the *Smritikaras* from Manu to Raghunandan, down to the early-twentieth-century orthodox commentators on *jatimala,* who upheld the dominant cultural values of a hierarchical society, where rank was ascriptive, hereditary and corporate, and groups were defined by endogamy.

Indeed, in the Namasudra mental world these dominant religio-cultural values were by no means completely rejected; nor in popular perceptions, whatever the gurus might say, did the Matua cult ever appear in an oppositional form. In the late nineteenth century, Risley had found them participating in *bastu* (earth) *puja, bansura* (river god) *puja, nauka* (boat) *puja* and *manasa* (snake goddess) *puja*. [121] In the same period, another report from Dacca shows that the Namasudras looked upon all gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon 'with veneration', though they were 'prohibited from worshipping the costly pujas themselves on account of the cost'. Their principal deities were, however, Manasa (who had gained access to the Hindu pantheon), Lakshmi and Kartik. [122] As time passed, the Namasudras became zealous participants in all the Hindu festivals and on several occasions even got involved in violent conflicts with upper-caste Hindus, either in order to assert their rights to participate in such public festivals as Bhawani puja, [123] or to gain access to the sanctum sanctorum of Kali temples. [124] The conflicts, on the one hand, implied a growing protest on the part of the Namasudras against the disabilities of caste; but they indicated as well their eagerness to participate in the mainstream Hindu religious life, as both the deities, Bhawani and Kali, belonged to the Sakta tradition of Hinduism, which was quite opposed to the Vaishnava background of the Matua sect. This identification with established Hindu religious life became more and more pronounced or self-evident with the passage of time. What a Namasudra historian himself writes about their own religious practices is worth quoting in this respect: 'In every Namasudra village in east Bengal, they remain busy with thirteen religious festivals in twelve months. At the time of Durga puja, in every

Namasudra-populated area, the puja is celebrated with great fanfare. Apart from this, the members of this community perform like orthodox Hindus all other festivals of Hindu society, such as Kalipuja, Lakshmipuja, Manasapuja, Bastupuja etc . . .' [125]

This indicates the Namasudras' integration into the mainstream of Hindu religious life. Popular religion in its wider sense, or the religion which the vast mass of people actually practised, was thus not very different from, and much less antagonistic to, the established religion of the dominant elites.

IV

The real importance of the Matua sect lies in the fact that it did not merely provide a religion for the masses, but offered a philosophy and organization for the social movement of a depressed community. Gradually, the sect attracted more and more devotees from the Namasudra population of Faridpur, Bakarganj, Dacca, Khulna, Jessore, and Tippera districts, [126] and the leaders of the community began to use this religious platform for organizing a social protest against their degraded condition. Not only did Guruchand's teachings motivate the community to become more self-assertive, but he himself, with his influence as a charismatic religious preceptor, became the leader of their social movement, and Orakandi, his ancestral village, virtually became its headquarters. While Harichand had advised his disciples to combine action with devotion *(hate kam mukhe nam)*, his son Guruchand, conscious of the material needs of a depressed community, attached more emphasis to action, which he thought was necessary to generate in them a motivation for the acquisition of wealth. Guruchand's preachings therefore stood as a major deviation from the established Bhakti tradition which, as Max Weber would put it, tended to destroy the rational urge towards accumulation of property. [127] The doctrine of renunciation, Guruchand believed, had no significance for those who never enjoyed the fruits of life. Nor was it advisable for them, for similar reasons, to be lost in pure mystical devotion. 'Earn money, be educated and become respectable', [128] was therefore his principal advice to the

disciples. And this emanated from his clear understanding of the power relationships in society, which deprived the Namasudras of the opportunities of life. As we learn from his disciple-biographer, Guruchand often used to tell his followers that the Namasudras, though strong in number, were not respected by anybody as they had no power and it was power alone which could command respect. [129] As his other teachings indicate, he was also conscious of the locus of real power in a colonial state and the opportunities which that state system had offered as the sinews of power for a colonized indigenous society.

Education, Guruchand thought, was the first prerequisite for the acquisition of power, or in other words, for resisting the domination of the existing power elites. As the Namasudra peasants could not read or write, he argued, they were continually exploited and defrauded by the landlords and their agents, and were thus deprived of their legitimate share of the fruits of their own labour. Hence no matter whether they had food or not, they must educate their children. He stressed this point again and again before his disciples. And as a first step towards dissemination of education among his followers, he himself established a*pathsala* (lower primary school) in 1880 in his village Orakandi. [130] When that school ran into financial difficulties on account of the local Kayastha zamindar's non-co-operation, he invited, much to the dislike of many of his disciples, the Australian Baptist missionary, Dr C.S. Mead, to open a mission and a school at Orakandi on a plot of land donated by himself. [131] This missionary connection was considered to be crucial for a number of reasons. Education which the missionaries offered was essential for the Namasudras not only to escape zamindar-high-caste oppression, but also to gain access to the new world of professions which, Guruchand thought, was a necessary step towards achieving social respectability. [132] The major factor that was perceived to be responsible for the relative backwardness of the Namasudras in the spheres of education and professions was the unequal competition with the traditionally privileged upper castes. They could overcome this handicap only with the help of the superior state power and it was Mead who established the preliminary connection between them and the

colonial government. Through Mead's mediation, in 1907 the first Namasudra delegation, headed by Guruchand himself, met Sir Lancelot Hare, the then Lieutenant Governor of the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, and apprised him of their grievances and expectations. Interestingly, immediately after this meeting, Guruchand's son Sashi Bhushan Thakur, and some of his close associates, like Tarini Charan Bala and Kumud Behari Mullick, received government appointments. [133] Their community regarded this as a symbol of recognition by the ruling authorities—a recognition totally absent in the pre-British days and which, they believed, would ensure them better treatment from the local Hindu society as well. [134] A further recognition came in 1911, when the census authorities, in response to Mead's recommendation, Guruchand's persuasion, and the persistent agitation of the community, recognized it as 'Namasudra', dropping once and for all the hated appellation 'Chandal' from their decennial reports. [135] In 1912, in recognition of his services to his community and the Raj, Guruchand was honoured with a *durbar* medal, which was presented to him by Lord Carmichael at a special meeting at Faridpur district headquarters. [136] On this occasion, Guruchand is known to have purchased a ceremonial dress at the exorbitant price of Rs 500. [137] What he appears to have aimed at was a spectacle that would both impress the established elites of the society, and generate in his community a sense of collective pride for this recognition by the state power.

To Guruchand, the rising tide of the nationalist movement in the early twentieth century appeared to be detrimental to the community-centric interests of the Namasudras. His attitude to nationalism became clear during the Swadeshi movement, which seemingly threatened to engulf the Namasudra protest. He and his associates successfully persuaded the members of their community to believe that *swadeshi* was a slogan of the rich high-caste Hindu gentry, who had always in the past oppressed the Namasudra peasantry, both socially and economically. The movement, as the guru told his disciples, was entirely in the interest of the affluent classes, which wanted to shift the burden

to the poor peasants by forcing them to buy more expensive Swadeshi goods. Never in the past had these nationalist leaders ever spoken a word against the inhuman treatment which the Namasudras and the lower castes had been subjected to. So now if they wanted their participation, they should first wage a battle against social inequities. But this, as Guruchand informed his followers, these leaders were not prepared for, as their movement was without a social content. [138] The identification of the Swadeshi movement with the oppressive gentry seemed to be self-evident, as most of its leaders and volunteers in east Bengal came from this social class which frequently used its coercive power to compel the Namasudra peasants to participate in the movement. [139] The latter detested this and the antipathy that was generated persisted through the days of the non-co-operation and civil disobedience movements. Chittaranjan Das is believed to have personally written to Guruchand asking him to ensure the participation of the Namasudras in the non-co-operation movement. But he refused to respond, for he believed that this movement, too, like the earlier one, was only meant to further the interests of the wealthy upper-caste *bhadralok*. The way the guru explained the situation to his disciples reveals his understanding of the social realities around him and his perceptive judgement on the nature of the nationalist movement. In an average educated high-caste extended family, he mentioned, usually one brother was a lawyer, the second a clerk, while the third was a trader. So while the lawyer brother would leave the court and join the non-co-operation movement, the clerk would retain his job to maintain the family, while the businessman would actually make profit by selling *khadi*. So the poor Namasudra peasants who were not connected with any office, court, or trade should not participate in this movement, as it would not bring any tangible benefit to them. When India would attain freedom, he argued, it would be a freedom for the privileged upper castes, while the lower orders would remain deprived as they always had been. 'The day we feel that this is our country', Guruchand is reported to have told his disciples, 'we will lay down our lives to remove the miseries of our motherland.' [140] The words might well have been his biographer's, rather than his own; but these represent a mentality which

both Guruchand and his contemporary followers might have shared. It indicates that the antipathy towards nationalism was not just a manifestation of loyalty to the British. On the contrary, it was more an expression of protest against social and economic injustices perpetrated on them by the high-caste gentry and professional classes, who had long constituted the leadership of the struggle against the Raj. Their mentality, in other words, reflected a social perception in which nationalism, for obvious reasons, appeared as elitist, leading to a consequent inclination to defy its ideological hegemony.

As a result of such persuasion, the Namasudras in large parts of eastern Bengal remained almost completely unaffected by the non-co-operation or the civil disobedience movements; at different places they also actively opposed such nationalist agitations. [141] This did not reflect their passivity, for Guruchand himself believed that if the Namasudras did not actively participate in politics, social power would continue to elude them. [142] But their politics was to be of a different nature; its prime objective would be to demand their legitimate share of the opportunities created by the colonial state, i.e. education, employment and political representation. Since 1906, the colonial policy of protective discrimination in favour of the Muslims had generated similar expectations in the minds of the Namasudras. They also demanded special privileges for a depressed minority and Guruchand's son Sashi Bhushan Thakur maintained close contact with Nawab Salimullah of Dacca, the leader of the East Bengali Muslims, 'to co-ordinate a joint resistance to the antipartition agitation.' [143] Such demands continued to be raised even in later years, particularly on the eve of the announcement of the Montagu- Chelmsford Reforms (1919) and again on the arrival of the Indian Statutory Commission (1928). [144] In 1930, at a meeting at Khulna Sadar town, Guruchand himself emphasized in his presidential address that emancipation of the lower castes and the untouchables would never be accomplished unless and until they had a share of the political power which had been devolved upon the Indian people through successive constitutional reforms. [145] And this could be ensured only through a separate electorate, which the

Communal Award of 1932 ultimately provided for. The Faridpur Namasudras, therefore, upheld the 'Award', even while Gandhi was continuing his fast to secure abrogation of its provision of a separate electorate for the Scheduled Castes; they also condemned the Poona Pact which took away this privilege. [146] In the elections that followed in 1937, a number of Guruchand's close associates, including his grandson Pramatha Ranjan Thakur (popularly known as PR. Thakur), now an England-returned barrister, contested and won as 'Independent' candidates. Their subsequent decision to support the Krishak Praja Party-Muslim League coalition government reduced the Congress, the representative of 'mainstream' nationalism, to the position of a minority party in the Bengal Legislative Assembly. [147]

Yet, the political behaviour of the Namasudras cannot be called separatist *per se*, for they were pursuing only what they considered to be the legitimate interests of their community. And these very interests, as these were perceived, also dictated that their ultimate objective should be to seek integration into the political nation, as respectable members of that larger community. Till about 1937, the Namasudra leadership had maintained a distance from the Congress. But soon they were disappointed with the new coalition ministry, which did precious little for the benefit of the Scheduled Castes. [148] The Congress now tried to capitalize on this disaffection to appropriate the Scheduled Caste movement, and the Calcutta Scheduled Caste League, formed in early 1937, became the vital link between the two movements. P.R.Thakur, who was at the helm of the Namasudra movement since his return from England in 1930, was associated with this League, while on the Congress side the persons who were really instrumental in forging this new alliance were the two Bose brothers, Subhas and Sarat. It was due to their initiative that around the beginning of 1938 a number of prominent Namasudra legislators, including P.R.Thakur, agreed to co-operate with the Congress and withdraw their support from the Muslim League-backed ministry. [149] This was followed by their meeting with Gandhi in March 1938, where P.R.Thakur expressed in no uncertain words his lingering suspicions about the sincerity and good intentions

of the high-caste Congress leaders. [150] But the problems were soon resolved, as there was now visibly more initiative on the part of the Congress leaders to win over the Namasudras. Guruchand died in 1937 and at the meeting called on his first death anniversary, Subhas Bose, in his presidential address, paid glowing tributes to the late leader of the backward classes. [151] This was soon followed by Gandhi's personal letter to P.R. Thakur, describing his grandfather as 'a great guru'. [152] Then in July 1938, on a personal invitation from Gandhi, P.R. Thakur went on a tour of the Congress- ruled provinces and on his return issued a press statement that he was very impressed with the achievements of the various Congress governments 'in improving the lot of the Scheduled Caste people'. [153] A few months later, on 28 May 1939, as the President of the All Bengal Namasudra Conference, held at Tamluk, he advised the members of his community to 'join the National Congress and fight for India's freedom'. [154] This was a complete reversal of Guruchand's political stand—the trajectory of events during the last few years of the 1930s only shows how rapidly the political alienation of the grandfather had given way to the integrationist ideology of the grandson. The transformation was however rooted in the logic of the movement itself, which as its ultimate objective had sought accommodation within the emerging power structure of the Indian nation state, which at the time of the beginning of the Second World War appeared to be a distinct possibility.

During all these years of hectic political activities and shifting allegiances, the Matua sect however remained at the centre of the social universe of the Namasudras, providing their movement with the crucial organizational base. One of the slogans of Guruchand, *jar dal nei tar bal nei*, [155] i.e. those who do not form a group do not have power, conveyed the message of organizing for collective action. And it was around this sect that the initial mobilization of the Namasudras took place, as the original disciples of Guruchand, known as the 'sixty-four *mohantas*, preached the ideas of Hari-Guruchand and gathered around them hundreds of devotees from various parts of the province. [156] To bring them under an organizational network, a Matua Mahasangha was

started sometime before 1915, through the initiative of one of the early disciples, Tarak Gosain. PR. Thakur, after his return from England, thought of reactivating this social organization and convened at Orakandi a general conference of the Matua devotees in 1931. [157] The following year, the endeavour of Gopal Sadhu gave the sangha the modern organizational shape of a 'mission' and an ashram was started at Khulna district town on a plot of hundred *bighas* of land, where Namasudra students, coming from poor peasant families, could stay and continue their studies. [158] Through these organizations the upper echelon of the community could effectively reach the grassroots and communicate their messages of a social and political movement. The various other community organizations of a more political nature, such as the Namasudra Hitaishini Samiti (started in 1902), the Bengal Namasudra Association (started in 1912) or the Bengal Depressed Classes Federation (started in 1932), maintained a close relationship with these socio-religious organizations, as these offered the most convenient means for mass contact. [159]

At a less organized and informal level also, the Matua sect provided further opportunities for social mobilization. The Baruni *mela,* their most popular religious festival, was held to celebrate the birth anniversary of Harichand on the last day of the Bengali month, Chaitra (mid-April). At different places, the most important among them being Orakandi and Lakshmikhali, the *mela* attracted thousands of devotees across local boundaries and made social interaction and exchange of ideas among them possible. [160] Apart from this Guruchand's annual *sradh* ceremony provided a similar occasion for socio-religious gatherings, which the Namasudra leaders skilfully used to inculcate their political message among the ordinary members of their community. [161] Thus they systematically tried to convert their strength of number into a source of political power—a political imperative which Guruchand himself had drawn their attention to.

V

The Matua sect, as it would appear from the foregoing discussion, had developed along with the emergence of a low-ranking, upwardly-mobile community—the Namasudras of eastern Bengal. As the amphibious boatmen were transformed into a peasant community, with the reclamation of the marshy wastes, they developed certain emotional and practical needs to adjust themselves to the new social situation. First of all, the new social identity that was now constructed had to be asserted and this necessitated an attempt to subvert the ritual hierarchy or defy the social authority of the dominant higher-caste elites. This required, in other words, a reworking of the relations of power in local society, for which the Matua sect provided them with solidarity and self-confidence. The congregational nature of the sect and the ritual of group singing of devotional songs, helped them to develop, and continually reinforce, a sense of collectivity, and this was possible as the sect remained more or less coterminous with this particular community. On the other hand, as these people developed their peasant identity, it became mandatory for them to adopt and internalize the prevalent cultural ethos of the settled agricultural society. Accommodation within the main structure of Hindu society would alone legitimize their new social status and therefore, they felt the compulsion to conform to the dominant moral and behavioural codes of that society. And the Matua sect helped them in this process of acculturation, by undertaking the reformation of the manners and customs of the community at a mass level.

As the Matua sect was an integral component of the sociopoli-tical movement of the Namasudras, its philosophical tenets were determined by this community's cultural and material needs. It therefore selectively and creatively appropriated or adapted ideas and symbols from the existing philosophical discourses. It oscillated in, and never tried to break out of, a continuum that had the rationalist universal humanism of the Bengal Renaissance at the one end, and the heretical radicalism of the deviant religious sects at the other. Its universalism could not be pushed very far, because of its community- centric moorings. Its subversive edge was blunted by this community's urge for accommodation. While sexual morality and structured family life were

stressed upon, there was also an attempt to generate a rational motivation for accumulation of wealth. Above all, there was always an awareness of the relations of power in society and a consequent earnest desire to aquire power through participation in institutional politics. The alienation of the leaders of the Namasudra community from mainstream nationalism ultimately gave place, in course of three generations, to an integrationist stand, as it was felt that their strength of number had now been converted into a position of power. But what had really effected this conversion was the social organization of the Matua sect. By facilitating social interaction across status barriers within the community, it had articulated a community consciousness among the Namasudras and thus had helped their leaders to mobilize a mass following in support of their politics. It was largely because of this cohesive impact that by the end of the 1930s the Namasudras were being recognized as a well-organized power base in the institutional politics of Bengal. The real significance of the Matua sect therefore lies in the fact that it had offered a philosophy and organization which, in course of little more than half a century, could effectively elevate a backward community to a position of social and political importance. It had helped them to construct and assert a new collective self-image, when necessary even by attempting a subversion of the existing relations of power. But when their protest was ultimately coopted into the hegemonic order, it was this sect again which palliated that accommodation process. Its philosophy was neither revolutionary and radical, nor irrational and exotic. Its proper meaning and importance can be comprehended only if it is situated in its social context, provided by the impulsive urge of an upwardly mobile community to establish itself in a position of honour within the wider matrix of social and political relations in colonial Bengal.

14

Social Suffering and Salvation

The Relevance of *The Buddha and His Dhamma* *

V. Geetha

Introduction: The Importance of Dhamma

When Dr Ambedkar announced in 1935 that though born a Hindu he would not die as one, he expressed a deeply- felt intent to turn away from and reject Hinduism. This intent was acutely and incisively argued out for the rest of the decade, as he cast about for spiritual choices that dalits might yet make. During this time, his anger against Hinduism was palpable, and occasioned as much by the political disappointment and consequent angst he experienced in the wake of his signing of the Poona Pact, as it was by his lifelong impatience with Hindu dharma. In fact, while reviewing various conversion options available to him he measured each in terms of its willingness to honour dalit political claims. However, when he returned to the question of conversion in the late 1940s, he had shifted ground—it was not so much political concerns that directed his interest; rather he appeared keen on expounding a new metaphysics, and one that was adequate to the needs and conditions of modern life. When he did convert a decade later, he had come full

circle. Angry and hurt by his experiences in the legislature over the issue of the Hindu Code Bill that he had framed and which was a cherished piece of legislation, aiming as it did at a codification of Hindu law, he made a decision that he had long been contemplating—and converted, along with lakhs of his followers, to Buddhism, which he rechristened as 'navayana', the new path. In Buddhism, as his *Buddha and His Dhamma* makes clear, he had found a rational, elegant, and aesthetically fulfilling worldview, an ethos that was the very antithesis of the world of caste and the inequalities it mandated. This ethos was not only liberating, but also signified an ethics that would be the basis for a new politics, a new just and equal social order.

Dr Ambedkar's journey to Buddhism may be read in any number of ways and has been since the day of his conversion. But whatever the meanings that we attach to the act of conversion, and howsoever we read his attempt to rethink Buddhism for our times, it is clear that his conversion had to do with political, ethical, and spiritual concerns; in fact these were inextricably linked in his understanding of an ideal social existence, both in an individual and collective sense. This is not entirely surprising. For long, he had been wary of and uneasy with that other great exponent of ethics in the context of politics, Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi's characteristic linking of politics and piety bothered him, especially the Mahatma's rhetoric of faith, his insistence on heeding his ineffable 'inner voice', which he claimed guided him in his darkest moments. Dr Ambedkar had no use for such a voice or the God that mandated it—as his lovely epigraph to *What Congress and Gandhi Did to the Untouchables* has it, he wanted a world without God, but one in which men may yet be mindful of each other. The life of the Buddha appeared exemplary in this respect—as much as his persona, the ethics he taught and practised, and which he enjoined unto others, appealed to Dr Ambedkar's mind and consciousness. To Gandhi's God, Dr Ambedkar counterposed the Buddha.

It seems to me that this traversing between the realms of faith on the one hand and ethics on the other, which Dr Ambedkar undertook with great earnestness, helped him measure and define the political realm as a radical, republican space. His conversion suggests we abide by a

secularism that is anchored not so much in a separation of realms and powers, but in the unifying field of a universal ethics.

In what follows I shall map Dr Ambedkar's *navayana* as a path and a place, an anticipation of utopia. I hope to do this by reading his conversion in terms of another less momentous yet significant conversion—of that other great modern Buddhist of our time, Pandit

Iyothee Thass, who accepted *dhiksha* in the late nineteenth century. As committed to re-examining the ethical basis of our social life, Iyothee Thass nevertheless was concerned with the cultural history of Buddhism, in a way that Dr Ambedkar was not, and this contrasting response to the salience of the Buddha's life and times should help us situate the political acuity that marks Dr Ambedkar's interest in the *dhamma.*

Dhamma, History, and Culture: Iyothee Thass' *Adi-vedam*

The importance of Buddhist ethics for our times was urged by several people in late colonial India. Beset with anxiety and hope in the face of an inevitable modernity that threatened to turn over all that was familiar and usher in a new world, anticipating the fulfilment of promises held out by European political liberalism and later by socialism, and troubled by the unregenerate nature of an unequal and cruel social order, several men turned to Buddhism to guide them in their search for a brave new world. For many of them, Buddhism seemed a fit response to the dilemmas of modernity—it appeared to adopt a rational disposition towards human affairs even as it counselled a creed of non-desire. Further, it was not inimical to notions of equality and liberty, social justice and fraternity, and it endorsed active acts of compassion and understanding towards fellow beings, including the non-human. Most important, Buddhism was not abstract in the least, it was not concerned with the epistemology of suffering and sorrow; rather it wished to address their cessation, suggest ways of staving off the inevitable despair that attends a heart wretchedly given over to insatiable want and greed.

Of all those who turned to Buddhism to illumine their sense of a flawed social world they desired to mend, Pandit Iyothee Thass was somewhat unique. A dalit *siddha* medicine-man by training and a Tamil scholar, he converted to Buddhism in the late nineteenth century and thereafter wrote extensively on his new faith, annotating its meanings for the newly initiated as well as for those future generations that might want to adopt Buddhism as their religion. Arguing as Dr Ambedkar would later, in *Who are the Untouchables,* Iyothee Thass made a case for untouchables as former and original Buddhists who had been exiled out of the social order since their faith offended and challenged *varnadharma,* especially the prerogatives of Brahmins, and their claims to spiritual authority. He worked out an entire mythos of meanings which drew on Tamil literary texts to explicate the wilful denigration of Buddhism and Buddhists down the ages.

This fabulous attempt at re-reading Tamil texts reached its fruition in his magisterial *Adi-vedam,* which recounted the life of the Buddha in great detail. Iyothee Thass appears to have been familiar with the Pali canon as well as the Sanskrit *Buddhacharita,* and, being a medicineman, was steeped in the lore of healing. He put the hermeneutics of Tamil linguistic scholarship to good use, as he set himself the task of reworking the Buddha's life story within a recognizably Tamil discursive universe. He prised apart words to situate them in new and unexpected semantic contexts, re-read, rather audaciously, the meanings of Hindu holy names and famous *puranic* tales to render them adequate to the needs of his new faith, and assimilated well-known non-Hindu religious texts, such as the Mosaic laws and commandments, as well as the New Testament, to the wisdom of the Buddha. Drawing on words and terms from the *siddha* healing tradition, he offered sophisticated glosses on desire, pleasure, despair, lightness, and freedom, linking together somatic and mental states. His account of the Buddha's life turned out to be vast and encyclopaedic—almost as if he wished to create an ur-text, comprising different narratives, registers, and histories. In all this, though, he did not lose sight of his intent—to present the Buddha's worldview and creed as apposite for our times, especially for dalits.

Iyothee Thass' attempts to rework Buddhism for a Tamil context were of a part with his efforts to secure political rights for dalits within the colonial scheme of things. He tried to interest the Madras chapter of the Indian National Congress in the plight of the *pancha- mas*, as dalits were referred to then. He also petitioned the colonial government, seeking succour for dalits who faced systematic and everyday discrimination, humiliation, and abuse. *Tamizhan,* the Tamil weekly that he edited, carried detailed news of dalit lives, the problems they endured in their work contexts, public spaces, and in their quest for education and dignity. Iyothee Thass also keenly followed the social reform debates of his time and reported on the linguistic biases, cultural predispositions, and social attitudes evident in caste Hindu responses to dalits and their claims. His account of caste society, Brahmin arrogance, and upper-caste disdain for those lower in the social ladder comprised a secular indictment of inequality and injustice. This, on the one hand; on the other hand, he consistently called an emergent nationalism to account, doubting its representative claims and wondering if it, indeed, had the commonweal in mind. For Iyothee Thass, sceptical as he was of nationalism, the colonial state represented a form of justice that was kinder to dalits and he trusted its offices than he did nationalist good intentions and the reform claims of caste Hindu society.

Though he wrote and declaimed against nationalism and its agents, Iyothee Thass did not imagine untouchability and the caste order could be effectively addressed within the discursive limits set by the former. Necessary as it was to abide by those limits and stake dalit claims on the terrain that they were being denied, he yet looked to other interpretative spaces to articulate his case for equality and justice. Scripture and literature on the one hand and Tamil literary history on the other were cited and invoked to redeem and transform the present. In the event he ended up writing a new social and cultural history—of Tamil Buddhism—that dalits could claim to be their own. This history in turn became a scaffold for the present to rest its burden and secure its future. In this sense, Buddhism was not to be a return of the previous, but also a sign of the possible. It represented a spiritual ethos that seemed absolutely indispensable to the fulfilment of secular ideals.

Fashioned in and through references to Tamil literary and religious texts, Iyothee Thass' Buddhism yet abided by core Buddhist tenets. Thus, he accepted the importance of desire and the reality of suffering *(dhukka)* but unlike Ambedkar he did not seek to reinterpret the latter as 'social suffering'. *Dhukka* for Iyothee Thass remained an existential idea, and one that was grounded in bodily experiences. *Dhukka* was graspable, given the mind's agility, its power of discernment. Iyothee Thass was drawn to the Buddha's appeal to reason and argued passionately that the mind was real and responsible for our actions; that our thoughts make us, as they do our acts. Neither fate, nor the status that attends birth, neither gods nor their attendants was as decisive as the human mind. However, bodily and mental acts were not entirely independent of each other.

Being the healer that he was and familiar with a tradition that linked somatic and mental states, Iyothee Thass described quite vividly the complex relationship between the two sets of acts. Bodily acts, he argued, governed as they are by the senses, leave their impress on the mind, such that good acts produce favourable mental states; likewise, the mind's movement, oriented towards good (or bad) gets inscribed on the body, producing as it were love or avarice, enabling self-knowledge or fostering (wrongful) desire and illusion, as the case may be (Iyothee Thass, in G. Aloysius, 1999: 226).

For Iyothee Thass, the self-validating nature of body and mind, the illusory world that they created could only be broken through an awareness of suffering. Such awareness, however, is neither physical nor mental. It is contingent on the recognition of the relationship that the *dhukka*-ridden self has with the world, with others. In Iyothee Thass' version of the famous episode of the prince Siddhartha saving a bird from being hunted by his cousin Devadutta, he has the former asking the latter if he would not feel pain were an arrow to pierce him and in fact pierces the said arrow back into Devadutta's palm to demonstrate that Devadutta was as vulnerable to hurt as the bird. He entreats his cousin to act on this sense of hurt, and help heal the bird. Then again, while watching workers labour in the fields, Siddhartha feels their effort as his own, and when, finally he chances upon age, illness, and death, he

imagines his own body, subject to such torments, and realizes how he would not want to endure decay and mortality (ibid.: 197-8).

In Thass' reading, this ability to see oneself as equally vulnerable as those one harms through word or deed, and as subject to pain and death as other human beings, is hugely significant, and on it hinges the possibility or otherwise of self-knowledge and salvation.

The path to the latter required an active remaking of one's phenomenal and mental life. The *Adi-vedam* insisted that one cleansed body and soul, and constantly worked through one's consciousness. How was this to be done? Firstly, it was important to come to terms with the fleeting nature of intense emotional and mental states, realize that nothing lasts and that immediate fulfilment of a want or gratification of a need only conceals an eternal hunger that must be addressed, recognized for what it is, a condition that is excitable and not to be easily rested. The thing then would be to acknowledge the burden of this condition, and work to relieve oneself of the pain, the *dhukka* it causes. What must not be done, or even if done, would prove unfruitful is vain questioning—attempting to find out if this sorrowing world is unreal, real, inconstant, or eternal, if death is indeed all, or if life persists after death. For these questions pre-empt us asking questions about ourselves, about what each of us needs to do to live with and yet not be ensnared in suffering (ibid.: 245, 249).

Secondly, it was imperative that a person cleansed his or her mind of the stain of difference, of that which makes us want to love, hate, enslave, control others. Iyothee Thass understood inequality and violence to be functions of this difference that we nurture in our hearts, out of ignorance, bound as we are often to the fulfilment of our own desires and needs. In place of difference, one ought to learn to see how all living things are linked, bound to each other. For, it is this reciprocity that helps to cut the knot of desire, of that profound self-love which fosters want. Recounting the story of a killer of animals who comes to heed the Buddha's words, Iyothee Thass pointed to how he not only gave up violence, but took to active loving and caring—in other words, mindfulness towards others came to replace that sense of

difference which pushed him the murderer to passionate hate, in the first place (ibid.: 286).

Mindfulness, however, was a state of existence, contingent on both enlightenment as well as right action. On the one hand, mindful-ness had to be achieved as an active mental state: 'when you realize that you can breathe evenly, when you learn to be mindful of your body, you also learn to be mindful of the bodies of others, you realize too that their bodies, like one's own will suffer, endure, die, and that what is steady, what survives is not this or that identity, neither man nor woman, not the self, or the non-self that is outside it, and this would lead to non-attachment, to being in the world, but not desiring, wanting, longing . . . only mindful . . .' (ibid.: 325—6). On the other hand, mindfulness demanded that one actively chose compassion: 'whereas a bird or animal can only protect its own, and not others, men ought to extend compassion towards all and not just their own kind . . . but this can only come from individual effort, from the discretion that separates good from bad, hurt from care . . .' (ibid.: 281).

Unsurprisingly, in Iyothee Thass' lexicon, feeding the hungry and ministering to the sick become important virtues—emptied of want and unexcited by desire, a human person does not suffer self-abnegation; nor is she rendered empty and alienated; rather she is filled with the desire to heal and do good. Iyothee Thass envisioned good deeds, compassionate acts as setting up a reciprocal cycle of compassionate deeds. Writing of the Buddha helping a herdsman with his goats, Iyothee Thass pointed out that at the time the selfsame herdsman brought the Buddha milk when the latter had almost starved to death, the Buddha realized that his earlier good deed had earned him this respite from hunger (ibid.: 220).

The most complete expression of compassion for Iyothee Thass was an empathy that embraced the entire living world. He accorded the highest value to *jeevakarunya*, to limitless compassion in the most expansive sense of the term. *Jeevakarunya* in fact is the burden of his *Adi-vedam,* and figures as the most superior of virtues in his discussions of the five landscapes of ancient Tamil literature. Suggesting that the

Buddha succeeded in converting the populations of these five landscapes, Iyothee Thass has the Buddha counsel *ahimsa* (nonviolence) to one and all, including fishermen and hunters. These latter are enjoined to learn the art of exchange in place of killing: thus the *kuravas* or hunters are asked to eschew killing animals and birds, since that would interfere with their karmic journey towards liberation, and instead take to exchanging the wealth of the forests, ivory, and so on, for food. Likewise, Iyothee Thass has the Buddha counsel fisherfolk to take to pearl-diving instead of fishing—the Buddha wonders if they would like to be caught with bait, even as fish are caught, whereupon the fishermen are shocked, and agree to his counsel (ibid.: 383-9).

Interestingly, for Iyothee Thass, productive labour signified value, and he counterposed it to killing and violence—his Buddha heralds the arrival of grain cultivation and animal husbandry in the Tamil valleys and pastureland.

Iyothee Thass' Buddha, then, recognized the reality of suffering through the experience of empathy, and this leads him to discard the sting of difference and uphold the reciprocal nature of all relationships. However, this does not mean that he eschews differences, or wishes to sublimate them in an abstract and characterless *Brahman*; mindfulness and compassion are to be exercised in relationship to the world, rather than made aspects of a meditative exercise meant to elevate the self.

What is curious though about Iyothee Thass' Buddhism is the place it accorded women—and in this instance it does not square easily with the secular values it otherwise admirably assimilates and transmutes. The *dhamma* of a woman, Iyothee Thass made clear, lies in her deferring to her husband, in observing the vow of chastity, attending to her household duties, and in anticipating her husband's needs. Further, she is to make sure that he does not swerve from the *dhamma*—that is, should he drink or lust after women it was her duty to reform him and return him to the path. In Iyothee Thass' version of the Buddha's first lay conversion, we have him defining male and female natures as essentially different; the former, notes the Buddha, is given to protecting others, the latter is the object of an other's lust; the former is brave, virile, the

latter given to ignorance. Given this, it was important for women to be modest, steadfast, and rightly fearful of their reputation. Iyothee Thass also has the Buddha counsel the merchant's wife—amongst these early lay converts—that women who take to the *dhamma* must not look at, seek out, or be around other men. Further, in their husbands' absence they ought to learn to run their households with a sufficient sense of awe of their husbands' ultimate authority. They also had to learn to be happy with whatever food and raiment the husband provided, and not seek more than what was available (ibid.: 277-8).

Thus, we see Iyothee Thass refiguring *dhamma* for women in fairly predictable and conventional terms. This is not entirely surprising. Jaina and Buddhist literature in Tamil, for the most part, urge a chaste, virtuous life for women, and besides, insistently warn against the 'wiles' of womanhood. This sense of women's *dhamma* however sits contrarily with the rest of Thass' metaphysics. For instance, in his discursive universe, the man-woman dyad is not merely a reflection of gender arrangements; rather it figures as an epistemic detail. His Buddha, when discussing the reality of *dhukka,* notes that everything has its other; men and women, good and bad, night and day, sleep and wakefulness are all paired opposites, and thus must it be with *dhukka*, it has to be viewed in relationship to its other, bliss. However, since *nibanna* requires the annulment of difference, or rather a mindfulness that is not provoked by difference, *nibanna* ultimately does not heed sexual differences, and it is irrelevant whether one is a man or a woman.

We are thus confronted with a familiar paradox: in the context of *nibanna,* sexual difference is immaterial, but the path to *nibanna* is constitutively gendered! Sexual identity thus precedes every other kind of identity, remaining relatively constant, and suffering little change even within the terms of a radical spiritual ethos.

Unsurprisingly, each of the values that Iyothee Thass sought to uphold was antithetical to the spirit of the caste system, of the *varna* order, that disallowed empathy, except in a very limited sense (for instance, towards one's own kind); which affirmed and arranged differences in a hierarchy, refusing thus the possibility of reciprocity;

and which valued limitless compassion only in the relationship of human beings and gods. Further, the caste system has no use for mindfulness, indeed it prefers that the mind not exercise its powers of reason or discretion, and beguiles it often with the notion of a menacing destiny.

By rejecting the ethos of the caste order, and suggesting instead a worldview at once mythic, somatic, philosophical and ethical, Iyothee Thass created a distinctive cosmology, one that leavened the secular discourse of rights, claims and justice that he had recourse to in his everyday context.

Rich, insightful, poetic, and poignant as it is, the *Adi-vedam*, on account of the *ur*-status it claimed for itself, is also unmistakably tendentious and fantastic. Though its ethical core is crucially dependent on its sense of social anger and justice, it is overlaid with textual readings that sometimes obscure what they ought to illuminate. Thus, Iyothee Thass' acute sense of the social world, of the reality of social suffering, gets absorbed into a semantic (and literary) field that is not consistently linked to the secular world outside of itself. This is most evident in his exposition of the *dhamma* for women, where older and established literary and cultural tropes negotiate his radical spirituality rather decisively.

Dr Ambedkar, writing at a later point in time, and after his faith in liberal political philosophy had been considerably shaken—not accidentally over the question of women's rights, as envisioned by him in the Hindu Code Bill—imagined a different future for the new ethics he publicly embraced when he converted to Buddhism. He insisted on the necessity of such an ethics, not merely because it would redeem an earlier and sadly limited political liberalism but also because it would mandate into existence a new politics, in fact, cause it to emerge. His conversion as well as the views he outlines in *The Buddha and His Dhamma* bear witness to this.

Whereas Iyothee Thass' conversion to Buddhism was mediated in and through a search for identity and history, Dr Ambedkar's conversion happened after his several efforts at creating the conditions for

an equal and just social order came up against social and economic indifference. His representation of Buddhism thus provides an interesting contrast to Thass': unlike *Adi-vedam, The Buddha and His Dhamma* is not an *ur*-text. It is not interested in rendering Buddhism an index of a distinctive culture and one that had been exiled by brahminical cunning. Rather, *The Buddha and His Dhamma* is a thoroughly historical text, bearing the marks of it author's lifelong struggle for social and cultural justice. Dr Ambedkar built this struggle into his narrative: his rejection of god and godliness, self-abnegation and the virtue that attaches to it, his impatience with clever doctrine and cleverer sophistry, his conscious inclusion of the socially excluded in every instance within the fold of the *dhamma,* pitiless rejection of birth-based and other privileges, self-conscious assertion of women's equality, in both material and spiritual matters, and finally his affirmation of *maitri* or loving kindness, which goes beyond compassion and implies universal fellowship in the widest sense of the word—all of these replay arguments he had earlier deployed in diverse political contexts. The secular and the sacred, the political and the ethical thus come to inform each other in very complex ways, and this contrasts with the fate of the secular in Iyothee Thass' work and times, captive as it was to the seductions of literary exegesis on the one hand, and the 'goodwill' of the colonial state on the other.

Turning to *Dhamma:* The Ethics and Politics of Fraternity

Dr Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism in 1956 ended a lifelong struggle he had waged with Hinduism and the Hindu social order. From early on in his public life, he had wrestled with the question of spiritual relevance and sought to rethink Hinduism, from the point of view of dignity, compassion, and justice. Tukaram's matchless verse and Ramanuja's all-encompassing theology of love and liberation held his interest during this time. However, he found no spiritual or social solace in these devotional traditions. Further, in the public world that he worked in, he experienced such rancour and prejudice that drawing on catholic traditions of worship appeared futile—though they were dissenting traditions in their own time and place, in the modern

present, they were clearly not capable of forcing caste Hindu consciousness into a re-examination of itself, or relive in the present its past moments of rupture.

During the late 1920s, he and his fellow dalits in Maharashtra initiated several civic struggles in the course of which, as during the Parvathi temple satyagraha, they laid claims to temple spaces, on the basis that these were public and hence potentially open to all. These struggles may be read as initiatives that desired to refigure sacral space, rendering it open and limitless and, in the process, configuring a new civics, at once secular and sacred—sacred, on account of the privileges it decried in the name of a common spirituality (the notion that a God, if indeed he or she as such will not observe differences), and secular on account of its refusal of the salience of sacred custom and habit.

More expansively, this sense of a world that did not heed rules of access, based on birth, ascriptive status, and custom, but which could be claimed by one and all, in terms of a covenant that human beings make with one another, was one that Dr Ambedkar deeply cherished. It was also one that informed his understanding of equality, justice, and liberty. In an essay titled 'The Hindu Social Order' he noted that the Hindu social order was inimical to equality and fraternity. This spirit of fraternity, he noted, was expressed with poignancy by the Pilgrim Fathers, who, landing at Plymouth, invoked the grace of God that had brought them safely, and also helped them forge a covenant with each other, in His name, 'by virtue of which we hold ourselves tied to all, care of each others' good and of the whole' (Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, Volume 3, 1987: 97).

Such a covenant, though, was virtually impossible in the context of the Hindu social order, because it refused, in fact insisted that it would disallow mutuality and reciprocity. Elsewhere, in *The Annihilation of Caste*, Dr Ambedkar famously noted that the Hindu has no public, and that his public was his caste. In the absence of 'social endosmosis' which makes it possible for classes to hold values in common, and share an extensive number of common interests, undertakings, and expenses, Hindu society had actively nurtured isolation and exclusiveness. Dr

Ambedkar went on to note that the absence of fraternity was a founded absence, based on a rigid economics which disallowed learning to many, condemned them to servitude, and forbade occupational mobility to all. Further, the caste system was not merely one that encouraged a division of labour, thereby rendering all forms of labour traditional and hidebound, but also a system that divided labourers. This vertical division of the working classes meant they could not hope to unite across caste lines to challenge an unequal economic and social order (Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, Volume 1, 1979: 47-8) .

The impossibility of fraternity in every sense of the word ought to be evident, argued Ambedkar, in the spiritual sanction it received—it was not merely the letter of faith that insisted on this, but its spirit as well. In other words, it was not so much misapplied doctrine as reformers would have it which was responsible for this state of things, but the doctrine itself that disallowed what Dr Ambedkar so valued—a world 'when there is free play back and forth, (and classes) have an equal opportunity to receive and take from others' Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, Volume 3: 113). He observed that religions across the world have consecrated inanimate and living creatures, the natural world, but only Hinduism had dared consecrate a particular social order and made it sacred. 'The Hindus are the only people in the world whose social order —the relation of man to man is consecrated by religion and made sacred, eternal and inviolate. The Hindus are the only people in the world whose economic order—the relation of workman to workman is consecrated by religion and made sacred, eternal and inviolate' (ibid.: 128).

Clearly, Dr Ambedkar did not imagine that a reformed Hinduism was possible or even desirable. His quarrel with Gandhi must also be understood in this context. Gandhi's desire to retain dalits within the Hindu fold appeared to him particularly perverse. He was annoyed too by the manner in which Gandhi brought God into his arguments—for instance in the matter of the separate electorates that the British wished to award dalits, Gandhi, heeding his voice of conscience, or the voice of God, as he called it, undertook a fast unto death to protest the separation of dalits from the rest of the Hindus *(sic)*. As far as Dr

Ambedkar was concerned, this matter of the electorates had everything to do with how men dealt with each other, and not what God meant Gandhi or anyone else to undertake. Even if it was indeed the case that Gandhi felt the guiding hand of God, it was not a choice that Dr Ambedkar could bring himself to endorse, as he made clear in the epigraph he attached to his book, *What Gandhi and Congress Did to the Untouchables,* written thirteen years after the signing of the Poona Pact had 'settled' the question of electorates and helped retain dalits within Hinduism. This settlement tasted sour for Dr Ambedkar, since he felt, rightly, that Gandhi had forced it on him and the dalits by going on his so-called epic fast. Not surprisingly, in the epigraph he insisted that a modern world was one where God (and by extension, his apostles) could have no place, and, as his argument in the book makes clear, in the case of the Hindu social order, to bring in God and invoke the sanctities of faith and identity could only further affirm dalits in their low and humiliating status. Significantly, in *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* he explicitly describes the *dhamma* thus: 'The centre of his (the Buddha's) *Dhamma* is man and the relation of man to man in his life on earth' (Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, volume 11, 1992: 121).

Not accidentally, then, Dr Ambedkar returned to reviewing the role of religion in Hindu life during this period (1930s), and declared three years after Gandhi's fast that he would not die a Hindu. His announcement was not meant only in a strategic sense—the manner in which Gandhi's 'epic fast' brought the sacred to bear upon the world of civics, of social relationships, perhaps made him want to rethink the sacred, in terms of a transformed civic order. He realized, too, the limits to Hindu social reform, and did not imagine dalits could expect anything more from that faith. Yet, during this time, his publicly-expressed ideas on faith appeared strategic than anything else. For one, as he listed the advantages and disadvantages of dalits converting to Christianity, Islam, or Sikhism, he weighed these in terms of what dalits could expect from each of these communities of the faithful, both by way of social support as well as political and other safeguards and concessions. He also seemed to want to make a choice that would allow him to retain a sense of national as opposed to an alien identity.

Buddhism, though on his mind, did not figure during the mid-1930s as a possible option.

But cutting through this strategic reasoning was another impulse: the desire to found collective life on a different ethical and spiritual basis. As he noted in a speech delivered at the Mahar conference in Bombay in 1936, a few months after he had announced his decision to convert:

> A religion in which man's human behaviour with man is prohibited, is not religion, but a display of force. A religion which does not recognise a man as man, is not a religion but a disease. A religion in which the touch of animals is permitted, but the touch of human beings is prohibited, is not a religion but a mockery. A religion which precludes some classes from education, forbids them to accumulate wealth and to bear arms, is not a religion but a mockery of human beings. A religion that compels the ignorant to be ignorant, and the poor to be poor, is not a religion but a punishment. (Speech delivered by Dr Ambedkar to the Bombay Presidency Mahar Conference, 31st May 1936, Bombay)

Dr Ambedkar made it clear in the course of this speech that all other religions were far more humane than Hinduism in this respect. Tragically, leaders and spokesmen of these various religions were less than sanguine about his decision to leave Hinduism. Some amongst the Christian leaders wondered whether, if Dr Ambedkar indeed did covert with his followers to their faith, it would constitute a genuine change of heart, or remain an instrumental act. They were also not quite sure of how the entry of a substantially large number of dalits into their fold would affect caste relationships amongst the faithful (Christophe Jaffrelot, 2005: 123).

Islamic leaders, while cautiously welcoming of his decision to abdicate his Hindu identity, were nevertheless worried that if their numbers grew with the entry of dalits, whether they would be able to retain their minority status in the polity, and if therefore they would not be rendered more vulnerable. The Sikhs held their premises open and were willing for dalits to retain whatever safeguards they enjoyed at present, even after conversion. But two things bothered Dr Ambedkar:

the British government was not willing to extend political and other concessions they had granted the Sikhs to the would-be converts, and besides, and more seriously, he had occasion to learn of the incipient casteism in the community from dalit Sikh converts (ibid.: 127).

The hesitation that greeted Dr Ambedkar's decision to convert may be viewed as symptomatic of that refusal of fraternity, which so grieved him. The Hindus were open about this. Hindu Mahasabha leaders suggested that he form a sect of his own rather than seek to convert. Mahasabha leaders and later those in the Indian National Congress also persuaded other leading dalit leaders—M.C. Raja, R. Srinivasan, Rajbhoj, and Jagjivan Ram—to distance themselves from his decision to leave the Hindu fold (ibid.: 125-9).

In any case Dr Ambedkar himself was not ready to make a decision yet. He was ready to convert, but was also biding his time, and wondering if he could carry the dalits with him in all instances. He was drawn to the spirit of the Gospels and the comradeship that Christianity was capable of, but was convinced that Indian Christians were not fraternal enough and would not worry about their dalit brethren (Christopher Queen 1996: 53). He wondered if Islam was a good choice after all, since he felt the faithful capable of great intolerance and violence. The Buddhists were open to him, but he had not yet decided if that was an option that would suit his needs. Yet he valued the freedom that the Buddha granted the human mind.

In his speech to the Mahars, to which I have referred above, he drew on the Buddha's famous words from the *Mahaparinibbanasutta* to underscore his argument about conversion: that it must be a deliberate choice, and not one that a person makes in haste or blindly. On being asked for a message before he passed on, the Buddha had pointed out to Ananda, his dear disciple: 'I have preached the *Dhamma* with an open heart, without concealing anything. The Tathagata [Buddha] has not kept anything concealed, as some other teachers do. So Ananda, what more can I tell to the Bhikkhu Sangh? So Ananda, be self-illuminating like the lamp. Don't be dependent for light, like the Earth. Don't be a satellite. Be a light unto thyself. Believe in Self. Don't be dependent on

Others. Be truthful. Always take refuge in the Truth, and do not surrender to anybody!'

Quoting the Buddha thus, Dr Ambedkar concluded his address on this note: 'I also take your leave in the words of the Buddha. "Be your own guide. Take refuge in reason. Do not listen to the advice of others. Do not succumb to others. Be truthful. Take refuge in truth. Never surrender to anybody!" If you keep in mind this message of Lord Buddha at this juncture, I am sure your decision will not be wrong' (ibid.).

These words notwithstanding, the decade of the 1930s did not see him do anything decisive with respect to conversion. But it is surely significant that he founded the Independent Labour Party during this period, almost as if he wished to fashion fraternity entirely within the terms of civic life. Here, again, his wanting to forge unity between dalit and Sudra workers proved to be an elusive goal. As he argued in *The Annihilation of Caste*, labourers were divided by caste, and proletarian unity was not easy to achieve. The early 1940s saw him busy with other matters, of administration and rule, and he returned to the question of conversion only later in the decade. In 1942 he had set up the Scheduled Castes Federation, but the electoral and political fortunes of that body did not bode well in the face of determined Congress hostility to his politics in Maharashtra. His disappointment at the hustings and the fact that he had to be nominated to the Constituent Assembly from Kolkata convinced him, perhaps, of the futility of that kind of political identity and labour.

Yet all this time he kept up his interest in matters other than the political. For one, he continued to read widely, and seemed to have been increasingly preoccupied with Buddhism. In 1948, in a preface that he wrote to an early modern text on Buddhism, P. Lakshmi- narasu's *The Essence of Buddhism*, he observed rather pointedly that, in upholding the importance of *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* Lakshmi- narasu, "'fought European arrogance with patriotic fervour, orthodox Hinduism with iconoclastic zeal, heterodox Brahmins with nationalist vision and aggressive Christianity with a rationalist outlook—all under the

inspiring banner of his unflagging faith in the teachings of the Great Buddha'" (quoted in Queen: 54). The Buddha engaged his attention thereafter too, as is clear from an unfinished note on *Buddhism and its Social Role* (subsequently published in Volume 3 of the Collected Works). Dalit followers in Maharashtra in the 1940s too gestured towards Buddhism, even as they made their antipathy to Hinduism public. In 1950 he visited Sri Lanka and met the Lankan monks but found that, in spite of an ancient monastic tradition, they did not appear to be particularly interested in the commonweal, and spoke of the virtues of outreach and sacrifice instead of fellowship. In 1951 he wrote an article for the journal of the Mahabodhi Society arguing that Buddhism was essential to save the modern world and that it was particularly apposite to the latter's needs and ways. He noted that societies function either on the basis of law or morality, otherwise societies cease to exist. Morality is often closely linked to religion, but in these modern times an ideal moral code ought to be in consonance with reason and recognize the universal validity of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Further, neither morality nor religion ought to make a virtue out of poverty (Dhananjay Keer 1990: 420-1).

The 1950s were difficult years for him. He laboured long and hard over the Hindu Code Bill but realized that this radical legislation that potentially could recast Hindu custom and practice was not likely to be passed. 'The Hindu Code was the greatest social reform measure ever undertaken by the legislature in this country. No law passed by the Indian Legislature in the past or likely to be passed in the future can be compared to it in point of its significance. To leave inequality between class and class, between sex and sex, which is the soul of Hindu Society untouched and to go on passing legislation relating to economic problems is to make a farce of our Constitution and to build a palace on a dung heap. This is the significance I attach(ed) to the Hindu Code' (Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, Volume 14, 1995: 1325-6).

Prime Minister Nehru's equivocation with regard to the Bill hurt and depressed Dr Ambedkar and once it became clear that the Bill would not be passed in the form he had envisaged for it, he resigned from the Cabinet (1951). The heartache and sorrow that his time in the Cabinet

caused him and the manner in which his boldest attempt at reformed legislation was stymied perhaps brought home to him the limits of that political liberalism he had valued and upheld all his life. The rule of law, the guarantees that progressive legislation could offer the country's poor and marginal people, democratic protocols that would ensure that archaic forms of authority, based on caste or class interest would not prove determinate—these ideals came apart for him as is clear from the text of his resignation speech. His turn to Buddhism must be viewed in this context as well.

In 1954, while dedicating a Buddha *vihara,* he announced his decision to convert to Buddhism, and also of the book that he was working on, on the Buddha's life. In 1956, he and his fellow dalits converted in a massive public ceremony in Nagpur and the following year his *The Buddha and His Dhamma* was published.

During the 1950s, Ambedkar's interest in Buddhism was inspired not so much by his anger over Hinduism, which he still retained; it was instead subsumed in a broader intention, his desire to create an enduring basis for genuine fraternity and equality. This time around, he would do it not through seeking allies, for that could well prove opportune; or through legal arrangements, which in the final analysis are workable only through the exercise of a radical political will and which in the Indian context was seldom consistent; but through insisting on a radical ethics. This ethics in turn would hinge on people adopting new ways of living, thinking and acting, both towards themselves and others. It is in this context that he turned to Buddhism. As he had noted in his 1951 article, this was not a religion of the book, nor was the Buddha a God—its rationalism, ethics and subtle poetry appealed to him.

The manner in which he made this poetry speak to his needs is the subject of the last section of this essay.

Sadhamma as Universal Ethics: Dr Ambedkar's Anticipation of Utopia

Among other things, *The Buddha and His Dhamma* may be read as an incipient critique of the modern, democratic state. As Dr Ambedkar noted in his resignation speech, the state cannot hope to exist thus, making laws and building institutions on a social dung heap. The relationship of state to society thus stood to be altered. Until the mid-1950s, Dr Ambedkar had imagined he could do this by making the state answer radical social needs, but that decade brought to him, like the 1930s had, in a different sense, that these needs were seldom recognized as such by the social world that gave birth to them. Political fiat and democratic labour could not hope to do much in this regard either, since political institutions and people's representatives were themselves not entirely convinced of the need to reform law and society. The rule of the majority, the basis for democratic politics, was deeply problematic in the Indian context, since caste Hindus, who were likely to assert their resistance to any and every kind of radical reform, would remain, at all times, a permanent political majority. He had attempted to work against the tyranny of such a majority, but the safeguards he sought in this respect were not granted—separate electorates for dalits, for one. His decision to opt out of this polity then must be taken seriously for what it tells us about the political realm—that it is at best limited, and at worst, a deception of the poor and the unfortunate in a context of endemic social injustice.

The Buddha and His Dhamma, however, is not an argument against political action or intervention; rather it seeks to redefine the political in and through ethical and spiritual concerns and practices. It demonstrates through the life of the Buddha the nature of the ethical life, and the choices that confront one, committed to equality, justice, and fraternity.

Much has been written about how Dr Ambedkar worked with various traditions of Buddhist scholarship—the *Buddhacharitra*, the Pali canon, and early Western interpretations of the Buddha's life and times—all of which he read, annotated, glossed, rejected, substituted, and changed in important ways. A scornful early reviewer described him as simplifying the Buddha's life into a message for modern times. Others have since read his effort differently, discerning in *The Buddha*

and His Dhamma a careful coding of the Buddha's life as one given over to rationalism and thinking about the greater common good; or as exemplifying a new, socially responsive Buddhism, which takes the ending of suffering to mean the ending of oppression as well, and the dawn of justice and equality. Yet others have attempted to identify the metaphysical core of his assumed faith, its aesthetics, and its purported ethics.

What is evident in all accounts is the distinctive edge he brought to his understanding of Buddhism. For one, he set out to define *dhukka*, not only in terms of the self-consuming desire or want that produces it, but also as social suffering caused by acts trained by the powerful and the unethical against the powerless. He did not obviously want to make dalits responsible for what ailed them, at the same time he was not unaware of the power of want and desire. What he does then is to impute want and desire to those that are overwhelmed by avarice and anger, and are therefore unable to act right—in his semantic universe, desire is as much *loba* or greed, and as likely as indulgence to cause *dhukka*. While glossing the famous scene of the Buddha watching labourers plough, Dr Ambedkar has him sorrowing at the fact that while the toiler toils, the master lives on the fruits of the toiler's labour (Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, Volume 11, 1992: 10). This, in his lexicon, is *loba*. Significantly, as I have shown above, the pain of labour, in Iyothee Thass, instils empathy, an awareness of a common mortality; in Dr Ambedkar though, it indicates a situation of inequality born out of greed and avarice. *Loba*, when accompanied by *kroda*, or anger and hatred, compounds the misery caused by want and produces endless strife (ibid.: 235). In redefining conflict, pain, and sorrow Dr Ambedkar retains the Buddhist view of desire as causing delusion and compromising the integrity of the self, but distinguishes false consciousness or illusory thought from illusion-producing emotions. In his discourse, *moha* clouds the mind, whereas *loba* and *kroda* work on the emotions. Mindfulness is therefore all, and capable of curing delusion and craving (ibid.: 49—55).

Further, *loba* and *kroda* cause hurt to others. Explicating the effects of these two emotions, Dr Ambedkar's Buddha points out: 'Craving comes

into being because of desire for gain, when desire for gain becomes a passion for possession, when the spirit of possession gives rise to tenacity of possession it becomes avarice. Avarice and possession, due to uncontrolled acquisitive instinct, calls for watch and ward.' The Buddha goes on to note that craving or greed is to be condemned because it causes strife, hurt, violence, and quarrels, and Dr Ambedkar further glosses the *Mahanidanasutta* on which he draws for his arguments in this context thus: 'That this is the correct analysis of class struggle there can be no doubt' (ibid.: 239). Desire thus produces social strife and contradictions and walking the path of *dhamma*, learning the impermanence of desire and want, of passion and its effects, and practising speech and acts that are mindful of how this may affect others produce social good.

Dr Ambedkar's marking of desire in this manner is particularly interesting, especially for the manner he links it to the doctrine of karma, or the effects of one's deeds. He rejects the notion that karmic effects are felt across time and pursue a soul even after death. Instead, he defines karma not merely as that which rebounds on a person, and about which he can do nothing, except endure its effects. Rather, he argues, karma must be seen to be a principle of order that sustains the universe. In this reading, actions, good or bad, produce their own consequences and this affects not only the doer, but also others. In other words, each of us affects the other and all action, then, is inevitably social. It stands to reason that all of us are implicated in a vast and complicated web of thoughts and deeds (ibid.: 244). To act then would require that one act responsibly—in Dr Ambedkar's view, this would mean that one acted with knowledge, and with a keen awareness of how our acts affect others, be it speech, action, or thoughts. Eschewing *loba, kroda* and acquiring the knowledge requisite to do so then were inevitably social acts. This knowledge though was not merely of the mind, but had to instil fellowship on the one hand, and virtue on the other.

The obtaining of such knowledge that would counter desire— defined as *vidya*—required a free exercise of the mind, and for this one ought to free oneself from the tyranny of texts, custom, and faith in supernatural

beings, God, and non-purposive discourses on the soul, re-birth, and so on. But the mere acquisition and possession of such knowledge was not enough; one had to learn to exercise one's mind, practice *vidya* with discernment. Discerning wisdom or*pragnya* was very important in this scheme of things, because it alone enabled ethical judgment. Dr Ambedkar made it clear, through his Buddha, that to act right, to follow the *dhamma* may not be easily assumed, in a spirit of mindless innocence. Rather the *dhamma* had to be learnt, through recognition of both right and wrong, and choosing right over wrong thereafter. The *dhamma* was thus learnt ethics, self-consciously chosen, rather than blindly accepted.

Yet *pragnya* was not all, for the *dhamma* had to be suffused with compassion, hence the importance of *karuna*—ethics cannot be a matter of principle but also of active love. The exercise of *karuna*, though fundamental to a practice of the *dhamma,* was still not sufficient. One needed to observe *maitri,* or loving kindness towards all, not only friends but also foes, and ultimately of creation. *Maitri* in this sense was not mere love, but active fellowship with the world, a fellowship that did not elaborate, codify, and render every difference an aspect of hierarchy and inequality (ibid.: 127-32, 325). Further, it was in and through such an annulment of differences between oneself and the larger world, an annulment that is demonstrated in and through meaningful ethical action, that one came to *saddhamma.*

Sadhamma required that one practises righteousness towards others, invites others to observe *dhamma,* sharing with them the knowledge of it, and learns to distinguish *pradanya* or moral insight from mere knowledge of the *dhamma* (ibid.: 291). *Pradanya* however had to co-exist with *sila,* with virtue (ibid: 295). Above all, though, *Sadhamma* meant that one realize the importance of *maitri* above all else, and realize that neither birth nor any other form of privilege may earn one a right, a choice that was unavailable to others. *Saddhamma* was, thus, in Dr Ambedkar's lexicon, the form of that ethical consensus that we forge with each other, maintaining amongst ourselves that we hold and shall exercise rights and compassion in common (ibid.: 325).

Dr Ambedkar made it clear that he did not mean by this that individual differences be subsumed in a collective *dhamma*. He accepted that our emotional and intellectual needs are different, that there may even be social and cultural differences amongst us, yet, he noted, none can nor may claim superiority over the rest; thus, there is nothing that sets one apart from others, except the nature of one's actions, which, in turn are dependent on one's thoughts, their goodness, purity. In his understanding private and public virtue were closely interlinked, given the nature of thought, which pertains always already to the world, and not only to the thinker that thinks it.

Through a series of arguments, Dr Ambedkar's Buddha, even as the classical Buddha did, rejects creeds intent on verbal or philosophical sophistry. The Buddha also rejects the claims of Brahmins to special privileges. Drawing on well-known texts such as the *Vajrasuchi* which set out to disprove the possibility of differences arising out of conditions of birth, he observes that the nature of birth is not dissimilar, whatever the status and caste of the mother and hence there can be no claiming of privilege on this count (ibid.: 302). He also notes that the Brahminical creed of *chaturvarna* cannot be a general law, since by the Brahmins' own admission it does not exist outside the confines of the land over which their doctrine holds sway (ibid.: 303). This refusal to grant universal value to *chaturvarna* marks an important moment in the text, for it allows Dr Ambedkar to propose that only *saddhamma* could be universal, since it does not recognize the principle of difference, marking status or privilege, as germane to the practice of ethics. It also allows him to demonstrate how, in the ultimate analysis, universal ethics is nothing but another name for fraternity, for a fellowship of people (ibid.: 325).

Throughout *The Buddha and His Dhamma* Dr Ambedkar makes it a point to insist on the virtue of fraternity, which is almost always linked to equality. Arguing that the *varna* order did most harm to women and Sudras, denying them the right to knowledge and the right to bear arms, both of which are required for meaningful social protest, he noted that the Buddha's *dhamma* insisted on these rights—by rendering all human beings capable of attaining wisdom and *nibanna,* and by

denying value to violence and war (ibid.: 91). Rebellion in this context required one to dissent and argue one's way to a universal ethics, even as the Buddha did, with his interlocutors.

As much as the Buddha's words, his actions and demeanour are important in Dr Ambedkar's text. They become focal points for a number of issues that Dr Ambedkar wishes to represent or discuss. Siddhartha is at all times the rational prince, sometimes tired, at other times eager, but his actions are always deliberate. Even when he chooses to leave home, this is on account of the dissident stance he adopts in a water dispute involving the Sakyas and their neighbours, the Koliyas—he exiles himself, rather to validate his point of view. Since his decision to leave comes in the wake of a long period of meditative calm, Yashodhara lets him go, noting that even if she were to hold him back that would mean nothing, keen as he was to leave, and also because she was aware of what bothered him, and so would not request him to say. Later in the text she sorrows, but Dr Ambedkar has her say that her pain is on account of the mortal being that she is, and knows therefore longing and loss, but not because she did not want Siddhartha to go (ibid.: 41). Not only is the prince rational, but the princess too is gracious and intelligent. Then again, when the Buddha argues with Ananda about letting women be part of the *sangha,* we see a rational, thoughtful man, who is unsure of what this would mean; he insists too that he does not doubt women's capacity for *nibanna* but that he is not clear about how this was to be accommodated (ibid.: 195).

Likewise with others in the grand Buddhist narrative, especially those who appear to be both marginal and iconic, we see Dr Ambedkar endowing each of them with a characteristic importance. *The Buddha and His Dhamma* thus enumerates each and every conversion by a marginal social person, the barber, the *chandalika*, the blacksmith in loving detail (ibid.: 185-90). This conscious narrativizing of important aspects of the Buddha and his life and work historicizes the text in particular ways, making a distant past do service to the present.

The text's approach to knowledge is crucial. As I have noted above, Dr Ambedkar is at pains to distinguish false from true knowledge,

wasteful exercises in interpretation and argument from knowledge that enables true discernment. His rejection of the claims of scriptural authority, equivocal metaphysics, and a philosophy of hedonism devoid of discernment, while very much within the Buddhist scheme of things, also answer to contemporary notions of worthwhile learning. Karl Marx, or more generally socialism, also constitutes one of the horizons of his enquiry as he examines the problem of understanding and social change.

Throughout *The Buddha and His Dhamma* we find no references to kings and states, except when the text warrants it, as with the exchanges the Buddha has with King Bimbisara and King Pasendi; and even here, the emphasis is on the ruler's righteousness. The state is not the object of Dr Ambedkar's address, and as he seeks to reconstruct this world, he also advances an alternative politics, one in which ethics is indistinguishable from justice, and where equality and fraternity emerge as central to both social life and the polity.

In Conclusion

We have here then a blurring of lines between civil and political society, only this blurring achieves a new social map, and one in which a universal ethics, premised on loving kindness, demands a state and politics that is pervaded by the *dhamma.* Thus it is not so much a question of what the state's attitude towards religions ought to be or whether it ought or ought not to interfere in matters of tradition and custom; rather *The Buddha and His Dhamma* appears to suggest that, as far as the state is concerned, it needs to move towards *sadhamma*, in keeping with the changes the Buddha wants in the realm of the civil order.

The contrast with Pandit Iyothee Thass' Buddhism could not be more evident—if we are to use the terms either of them deployed in their writings. Thass set greater store by practices of the self, by what Dr Ambedkar considered *sila*, whereas Dr Ambedkar insisted on a greater role for*pragnya* and *pradnya* on the one hand, and *maitri* on the other. For Thass, *jeevakarunya,* akin to *maitri,* was the supreme virtue, but this

remained in his universe an ethical category, whereas the fellowship that Dr Ambedkar invoked through his use of *maitri* shaded off into that much desired civil and political virtue, fraternity. It was this fraternity that made for the larger social and political good, Dr Ambedkar's Buddha makes clear, as he counsels the Vajjis against whom the monarch Ajatasatru wishes to wage war, that as long as the Vajjis practise a decent collective and fraternal life in their daily affairs, they would succeed in staving off war and conflict. In Thass, *jeevakarunya* remains very much within the realm of *ahimsa*, a creed of abstention, linked to productive rather than fraternal labour.

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15

Dravidian Movement and Saivites: 1927-1944 *

A.R. VENKATACHALAPATHY

> 'What, Sir! Your words first appear to support our view, then they seem to skirt it.'—A Saivite in a fictional conversation with a SelfRespecter. *Sivanesan* 2 (6), September 1928
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> 'I participate in both Saiva Siddhanta meetings and Self-Respect meetings. Some might say that I've no ideology and that I am a chameleon. It is not so. I have my ideological disagreements with Periyar . . . Periyar was born to oppose the selfish gang which has enslaved the Tamil language and the Tamil people. If Periyar had not come on the scene, we'd have been in the most degraded state, calling ourselves "shudras" without any shame.'—A. Varadananjayya Pillai, *Periyar Ramaswamy,* Pondicherry, 1949

In the existing literature on the Dravidian movement, the relationship of the Saiva Vellalar elite with the movement constitutes a central problematique. Both contemporaneously and in later scholarly and political literature, the movement has often been identified with the machinations of a bunch of Saiva Vellalar intellectuals who attempted to redefine their identity *vis-à-vis* the Brahmins, and also tried to secure a larger share of the fishes and loaves of office. Eugene Irschick, in his work on the non-Brahmin movement and Tamil separatism, sought the intellectual roots of the movement in

the writings of the educated non-Brahmins/Vellalars who formulated the concept of a pre-Aryan Dravidian civilization (Irschick 1969: 282—95). R Srinivasan, tracing the ideological genesis of the Dravidian movement, came to a similar conclusion.

Posing the question, A Vellala movement?' he saw the Dravidian ideology as 'basically the work of a tiny group of highly educated and capable Vellalars' (Srinivasan 1987: 17). Arguing that the movement ruled out the lowest orders of Tamil society, he holds that the 25 per cent of the middle- and upper-class Vellalars not only created the ideology but were also fervid champions of it (Srinivasan 1987: 4). Such an argument has its political uses and has often been employed to discredit the Dravidian movement. A striking illustration of this could be the recent debate on the Dravidian movement, in the literary supplement of the Tamil daily *Dinamani.* Thamizhavan, albeit using post-modernist phraseology, reiterates the same point, seeing the Dravidian movement as nothing but the collapse of 'a historical alliance' between Brahmins and Vellalars to dominate Tamil society (Thamizhavan 1992). While this argument shares the premises and conclusions of the earlier historiography, there is an interesting shift. Earlier, the Dravidian movement was often judged *vis-à-vis* the Brahmins and the nationalist movement. Roundly condemned for its 'regionalism', 'separatism', and 'chauvinism' and its so-called collaboration with the colonial rulers, the Dravidian movement was seen as undermining the nationalist cause. But in the present context where 'nation' is coming in for increasing attack, and caste, especially the Dalit question, gaining increasing prominence, the Dravidian movement is being judged in relation to this. Attempts are being made to identify it with upper castes, who are portrayed as the real perpetrators of caste oppression. The political mileage drawn from such approaches is considerable (Suresh 1992; Washbrook 1989).

In this context, the present paper attempts a fresh look at the relationship between the Dravidian movement and the Saivite elite in its complexity and ambivalence. [1] The time-frame of the paper is roughly

that of the *Suyamariyathai* or the Self-Respect phase of the Dravidian movement, between 1927 and 1944, when it was at its radical best.

1. The Rationalist Critique of Saivism

In November 1925, Periyar E.V. Ramasami (henceforth Periyar) walked out of the Tamil Nadu Congress provincial conference at Kanchipuram, unable to see through his resolution on proportionate communal representation (caste-based reservations). This event was to constitute a watershed in the modern history of Tamil Nadu. Following this, Periyar launched a strident and uninhibited campaign for social justice through communal representation, and a vehement attack on Brahminism which stalled its attainment. *Kudi Arasu,* the weekly started by him some months before his walkout, was the primary vehicle of his ideas. By mid-1927 there was a gradual shift in the content of Periyar's campaign which was reflected in the pages of *Kudi Arasu*. The attack on Brahminism and the championing of reservations quickly grew into a radical critique of caste and religion. The *itihasams* and *puranams* were critiqued from a rationalist viewpoint and condemned as irrational and inimical to morals and social justice. The *Ramayanam* turned out to be one of the first targets of this campaign. E.M. Subramania Pillai, a Saivite scholar, writing under the pseudonym of Chandrasekara Pavalar, began a serial on the 'obscenities of the Ramayanam' in *Kudi Arasu.* Gradually, this attack on religion began encompassing Saivism also. Saivite texts like *Periya Puranam* and *Thiruvilaiyadal Puranam,* and the Saivite saints like Thirugnanasambandar, were brought under rationalist scrutiny. In a serial on the venerated *Periya Puranam,* 'Meikandar' declared, '*Periya Puranam* creates caste conflicts; *Periya Puranam* advocates caste differences; *Periya Puranam* portrays acts inimical to one's selfrespect as devotion to God; *Periya Puranam* justifies murderous deeds as service to Saivism' *(Kudi Arasu,* 26 August 1928).

This attack on Saivism and its apostles by the Self-Respect Movement was initially encountered with shock, disbelief, and dismay by the Saivites. This was because the Self-Respect Movement was generally perceived by the Saivites as a movement started 'to counter the harm done by the Brahmins to the Tamil people' *(Sivanesan,* September

1932). The Saivites had for long seen the non-Brahmin movement as an organization to champion their cause and protect their interests, if not actually launched and run by themselves. In the initial stages of the conflict, this was emphasized again and again, and a compromise was sought on this ground. As Ilavalaganar, a student of Maraimalai Adigal, [2] wrote:

> Saivism is not one iota different from the primary aim of the Self-Respect Movement. The Self-Respect Movement arose to dispel the illusion of Brahminism from the Tamil people and infuse self-respect into them. Saivism also does the same. The Self-Respect Movement detests the Aryan Brahmins. Saivism too doesn't like the Aryan Brahmins one bit . . . The Self-Respect Movement wishes to uplift the depressed classes. That is also the basic idea of Saivism . . . The Self-Respect Movement is opposed to caste differences among the Tamil people. Saivism too emphasizes the same point . . . When there are so many common points, why should Saivism and Saivite apostles be depreciated and condemned? *(Sentamil Selvi,* July-August 1928)

It was also argued that the non-Brahmin movement drew its intellectual resources from the Saivite intellectuals. Maraimalai Adigal even claimed that the Self-Respect Movement came into being by adopting his views and principles *(SentamilSelvi,* May-June 1931)! The editor of *Siddhantam,* M. Balasubramania Mudaliar, went one step further when he said, 'The best parts of the Self-Respect Movement are nothing but alms thrown by Maraimalai Adigal, the spiritual father. If they who got these alms and campaigned based on it, are thankless to the spiritual father, all their efforts will go waste . . .' *(Siddhantam,* June 1929). The most strident anti-Self-Respect views were expressed in *Sivanesan,* a Saivite journal published from Chettinadu, which published a series of articles from early 1928 condemning both reforms and radical change expounded by the Self-Respect Movement.

Though there was much in common in the Saivites' reactions, they did not speak in one voice. There was much divergent opinion. In the beginning, these voices were a big chorus and individual strands could not be distinguished easily. But with the relentless campaign of the Self-

Respect Movement and the opposition it evoked, the different ideological streams became distinct, highlighting the ambivalent relationship between the two. Let us now turn to these conflicts among the Saivites.

2. Maraimalai Adigal and the Self-Respect Movement

It is hardly surprising that Maraimalai Adigal should be the first to respond to the challenge posed by the Self-Respect Movement. Born as S. Vedachalam in Nagapattinam, he had his early education in Tamil and Saiva Siddhantam, and was known for his erudition. Somasundara Nayagar, well known for his tirades against Vaishnavism and Vedanta, trained him further in Saiva Siddhantam. Adigal launched the Annual Saiva Siddhanta Conferences in 1906 and occupied an eminent place in the Saivite intellectual world. Well known for his Pure Tamil movement —a movement to rid the Tamil language of loan words, especially from Sanskrit—and his literary and philosophical treatises, he was highly respected.

From Adigal's diaries of this period, it is clear that the Self-Respect Movement occupied his mind. He seems to have discussed the criticism launched against Saivism with anybody who visited him in his house at Pallavaram, then a village outside Madras. [3] He thought of ways and means to counter the 'destructive movement' and the 'atheistic vomitings [sir]' of Periyar, he asked Ulaganatha Mudaliar, the brother ofThiru. Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, another eminent Saivite scholar, to arrange for a presidency-wide lecture tour to counter the propaganda of the Self-Respect Movement. Here it is interesting to note why, in Adigal's view, the Self-Respect Movement singled out Saivism for attack. He considered the movement to be the 'mischief of Vaishnavites'! 'The leader of the Self-Respect Movement is a Vaishnavite; his brother too, we come to understand, is a Vaishnavite who has converted many gullible Saivites to Vaishnavism. Their accomplices too are Vaishnavites. Some of the Justice party leaders too are Vaishnavites, they are also Telugu-speakers' *(Sivanesan,* June—July 1928). Thus, Maraimalai Adigal could not, at least initially, comprehend the far-reaching objectives and

the significance of the SelfRespect Movement, and was only able to come to terms with it from a very sectarian perspective. But not all Saivites were like him. Probably, this was why Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar refused to publish Adigal's essay 'Saivamum Suyamariyathai Iyakkamum' (Saivism and the Self-Respect Movement), which expressed these views, in his *Navasakti (MAD,* 5 July 1928). Adigal had to resort to the orthodox *Sivanesan* to get through his views *(MAD,* 10 August 1928).

Matters came to a head on 22 July 1928. Maraimalai Adigal presided over the annual celebrations of the Balasubramania Bakta Janasabhai at Royapettai, Madras, a leading Saivite association which boasted of Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, his brother, and M. Balasubramania Mudaliar, the editor of *Siddhantam,* as active members among others. In this meeting, Adigal 'condemned vehemently the atheistic doctrines of Mr Ramasamy Naicker [Periyar] and the mischief of his Suyamariyathai [Self-Respect] Movement' *(MAD,* 22 July 1928). During the course of his lecture, N. Dandapani Pillai, a Self-Respect activist and J.S. Kannappar, [4] of the editorial board of *Dravidan,* the Justicite Tamil daily, raised questions about the persecution of Jains by the seventh-century Saivite saint Thirugnanasambandar. Consequently, pandemonium broke out, and the meeting ended in confusion.

There were conflicting reports on what actually transpired in the meeting hall. Maraimalai Adigal wrote in his diary that he answered Dandapani Pillai's 'questions tellingly and showed that there was no(t) a particle of evidence to prove the Jains were persecuted by St. Jnanasambanda. My answers satisfied Dandapani Pillai and the audience and Mr Pillai, at the end of the speech, thanked me heartily and left the place' *(MAD,* 23 July 1928). This version was reiterated in the pamphlet issued by his supporters and disciples, '*Dravidanin Poimai* Nandantha Vannam Uraithal' (A true account of *Dravidans* falsehood). But the Self-Respect papers gave a rather different version of the events. *Kudi Arasu* alleged that Maraimalai Adigal instigated the audience to murder Periyar and that, when Dandapani Pillai and Kannappar raised

questions, Adigal broke into tears, unable to refute them *(Kudi Arasu,* 20 July 1928).

A virtual print war broke out and serious charges were traded between the two sides. The Balasubramania Bakta Janasabhai issued a series of pamphlets in defence of Adigal and refuted 'the calumnies heaped by the Self-Respecters on the Saivite religion and its apostles.' In *Kudi Arasu* too, there were editorials and articles attacking Maraimalai Adigal. Kaivalyam Swamiyar wrote a particularly hard-hitting piece, alleging that Adigal, while propagating Saivism, actually ate meat on the sly. He further added, 'Swami Vedachalam [Maraimalai Adigal] is no apostle born to establish religion. Nor is he a prophet. He is but a tutor who teaches for a mere wage' *(Kudi Arasu,* 12 August 1928).

Maraimalai Adigal was so infuriated that he met K. Subramania Pillai, eminent Saivite scholar, at his residence in Egmore in Madras, and 'warned him of the Justice party: told him plainly that he must not put faith in the support of that and asked him to practise as a vakil . . .' *(MAD,* 24 July 1928). He was so incensed about 'the brute followers of Suyamariyathai movement [who] continuously criticize me with rancour and indiscrimination', that he actually contemplated sending a letter to the police authorities about their 'mischief'.

Finally, in order to defuse the situation Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar and K.A.P Viswanatham, a Saivite and an active member of the Justice party, met Maraimalai Adigal at Pallavaram and attempted a reconciliation. They requested him to write 'a letter in a friendly tone' addressed to Periyar, to which Adigal readily complied. The letter ran as follows:

> Dear Sir,—I am fine. Let me know of your well-being. I understand from [K.A.P.] Viswanatha Pillai of Tiruchi that there is a note about me in *Kudi Arasu.* I am given to understand that it was written based on the report of *Dravidan* and *Tamilnadu* on the annual celebrations at Chennai Guhananda Nilayam. I've never wished nor even uttered a word that either you or the friends of your movement may come to harm. Don't mistake me and bear any grudge. However, I am not in agreement with your views regarding God and the apostles. Please do

not get offended by some of the reports in the press. May your attempts for the uplift of the Tamil people succeed *(Kudi Arasu,* 2 September 1928).

But the matter did not end there. As the letter was 'wrongly distributed' by K.A.P Viswanatham, the *Dravidan* published it as an apology tendered by Maraimalai Adigal to Periyar. Following this, Periyar wrote a long editorial in his *Kudi Arasu*. The editorial is of interest, not only for the magnanimity shown by Periyar, but also for the light it throws on the basis of the original reconciliation. Periyar emphasized that he had demanded an apology only for putting an end to the whole controversy. He not only accepted full responsibility for *Dravidan* s unwarranted discourse of the letter but also apologized unconditionally to Adigal. Only then did he publish Adigal's letter. However, he stood steadfast in his principles and said, 'But regarding the difference of opinion, how much ever [Maraimalai Adigal] is willing to compromise, we will not budge an inch from our views and principles, either for the sake of his or anybody else's friendship.' Then why did Periyar accept a reconciliation? 'Right from the time we came to know of [Maraimalai Adigal], a sort of inexplicable attachment grew. Whenever we discussed about him with our friends, it emerged that he was a close confidante and a source of strength to all our aspirations and principles' *(Kudi Arasu,* 2 September 1928). Thus, it was only on a broad non-Brahmin platform that a reconciliation was struck. Little else was yielded, as both stuck to their guns. As a sign of the reconciliation Maraimalai Adigal began a serial on the *Ramayanam* in the Self-Respect English weekly, the *Revolt.*

3. The Tirunelveli Saivite Conference

The reconciliation between Periyar and Maraimalai Adigal was more at the personal level and hardly addressed the ideological issues that were at the bottom of the controversy. As reiterated by Periyar, even in the 'unconditional apology' to Adigal, the Self-Respect Movement continued its tirade against Saivism. And when the Saivites sought to counter, in their view, the blasphemous campaign, the *Kudi Arasu* hit below the belt by exposing them in the following terms:

> When the Self-Respect Movement condemned Brahmins and Brahmin- ism, Vaishnavism and Vaishnavites, these Saivites jumped in joy and sang paeans to the Self-Respect Movement.
>
> Moreover, they even helped us when we attacked Sankarachariar and Brahmin domination. Later, when we started exposing the Vaishnavite puranams, they helped us. Further, when we argued that there was no such thing as the Hindu religion and that what goes by the name of Hinduism is nothing but Brahminism, they even rallied evidence to prove it *(Kudi Arasu,* 7 October 1928).

As noted earlier, the Saivite scholar, E.M. Subramania Pillai had written a series of articles on the 'obscenities of the Ramayanam' in *Kudi Arasu*.

The continued attack on Saivism by the Self-Respecters impelled the Saivites to adopt immediate firefighting tactics. In an 'appeal to the Saivite people, Saivite mutts and Saivite associations', the South India Saiva Siddhanta Sangam of Tirunelveli (run by V Thiruvarangam Pillai and his brother, V. Subbiah Pillai, the founders of the Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society) called for urgent action. It called for extended lecture tours of Saivite propagandists, the publication of pamphlets, the establishment of Saivite schools and more importantly the organizing of a Saivite conference. Out of this was born the Saivapperiyar Thanikkootam (The Special Conference of Saivite Scholars) which played a crucial role in the struggle between the Saivites and the Self-Respect Movement, throwing into sharp relief the complexities of the subject of our present exercise.

S. Satchidanandam Pillai, a respected Saivite scholar, was the first to respond to this appeal. In a lengthy personal communication to V. Thiruvarangam Pillai, he discussed matters at length. He conceded that '*Kudi Arasu* and *Dravidan* were first launched with the lofty ideal of improving the lot of the Tamil people in the political, public and social life. With the confused idea of freeing the Tamils from the conspiracy of Brahmins as their objective', they had now rejected religion as a whole. Blaming the Self-Respect leaders of ignorance in religious matters, he added that there was indeed some decadence in the state of religion. 'In this context', he wrote, 'It is my view that before condemning the

unwarranted trespasses of *Kudi Arasu* and *Dravidan,* we must call a meeting of scholars of Saivite and Vaishnavite *Tamil people*, [5] who are well-versed in the arts, religious texts, worldly matters, and ancient religion and culture. The meeting should not be a big conference which falls into the vile net of the press, but held in seclusion. The resolutions arrived at may alone be made public. Only then should we consider condemning the above journals. I am of the view that we should guide them along the right path and not try to finish them off. It is expedient to invite the editor of *Kudi Arasu* to the meeting and arrange for a dialogue.'

Satchidanandam Pillai's views were the result of much serious thought and contemplation. Resolutions were passed in the Saiva Siddhanta Mahasamajam in December 1928 and South India Saiva Siddhanta Sangam in January 1929 calling for the special conference of Saivite scholars. The moderation and sobriety of Satchidanandam Pillai were evident in the planning of the conference. But the SelfRespect conference held on 17—18 February 1929 at Chingleput came as the last straw, and any hopes of dialogue or compromise were dashed. In this historic conference, radical speeches and resolutions were made *(Kudi Arasu,* 24 February 1929). Two of the resolutions that evoked hysterical reactions among the Saivites were the ones regarding the dropping of caste surnames, and the condemnation of sporting religious marks on the forehead. [6]

These resolutions gave a sense of urgency to the Saivites and the arrangements for the special conference were hastened. Satchidanandam Pillai set the tone of the conference with a questionnaire titled 'Saivap- periyar Thanikkoottathin Avasiyamum Velaiyum' (The need for the special conference of Saivite scholars and its functions). This was carried in all important Saivite journals with an appeal for the con-sidered response of all concerned Saivites. The statement began with the preamble: 'Confusion now looms large in the society and religious life ofTamil Nadu. As the social formation and religion appear to be inextricably tied to one another, social reformers argue that religion is the cause of all social hardships, and are going

about condemning religion and working hard against it.' It proceeded to ask the following questions: (1) Is religion essential for culture and morality? (2) If yes, what is the nature of religious life? (3) What sort of religion is required in this century? (4) Can Saivism be that religion? and (5) What are the cardinal principles and practices of Saivism? The list extended to about 25 questions. Clearly, the Self-Respect challenge had rattled the Saivites: they were now being forced to introspect and raise fundamental questions. The Self-Respecters responded to this with counter-questions, reiterating their position.

Consequently, the special conference evoked great interest and the outcome was eagerly awaited. It also brought to the fore the various strands within the Saivites and much debate went on about them. Three predominant divisions could be discerned among the Saivites. The first was the orthodox group, consisting of scholars like P. Muthiah Pillai and Swaminatha Pandithar, who were for fundamentals, and opposed all change. *Sivanesan* was their mouthpiece. The dominant strand was that of the moderates which included Maraimalai Adigal, Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, Satchidanandam Pillai, and M. Balasubramania Mudaliar. Their aim was to accept some amount of reforms and overhaul Saivism to the needs of changing times, and silence criticism from others, especially the Self-Respect Movement. They wielded considerable influence over the Saivite fold and controlled major journals like *Navasakti, Sentamil Selvi,* and *Siddhantam*. Last came the reformists, a motley crowd consisting of S. Murugappa, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, P. Chidambaram Pillai, P. Thirukootasundaram Pillai, K.M. Balasubramaniam and others. [7]

The special conference was held on 29-31 March 1929 at Tirunelveli. Over 90 scholars representing about 35 Saivite organizations were present. The conference was bogged down in controversy right from the beginning. There were widespread accusations that the organizers had sent invitations and entry forms only to their trusted men. P. Thirukootasundaram Pillai was at first even denied entry into the conference hall. He further complained that the conference resolutions

were all passed only in the subjects committee and not debated in the general council *(Swadesamitran,* 20 May 1929).

The strength of the moderates was only too evident as all the resolutions reflected their preponderance. The conference resolved that religion was indispensable for morality and righteous living, and that Saivism was a rational religion suited to all times and all social formations. But it cannot be denied that the propaganda of the Self-Respecters too had its impact. Some forward-looking resolutions like the abolition of dedication of devadasis to Saivite temples, the elimination of obscene images from temples, and the nominal equality of all devotees within the precincts of the temple, were carried out. [8]

The other sections of the Saivite fold could not push forward their views. The orthodox Saivites were totally sidelined and the conference 'was tactful enough to steer clear of the shoals and shallows of orthodox Saivism' *(Revolt,* 10 April 1929). P. Muthiah Pillai opposed the resolutions regarding the equality of all inside the temple. He argued that 'the base classes' who indulge in drink and such other vices had no business inside the temples. He further elaborated his views in a particularly obscurantist article titled 'Poruthamatra Theermanangal' (Irrelevant Resolutions).

The reformists fared even worse, and as the *Revolt* observed, a three months' fuss had ended only in a lot of smoke. Scholars like K.M. Balasubramaniam, S. Murugappa, and P. Chidambaram Pillai did not even turn up at the conference, for whatever reason. The reformists put up a weak presence in the form of V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and P. Thirukootasundaram Pillai, and it is not even clear what they actually did. *Kudi Arasu* reported that 'V.O. Chidambaram Pillai elaborated on some of the ways to reform Saivism. As most of the delegates did not agree to his views, Mr Pillai walked out of the Subjects Committee' *(Kudi Arasu,* April 1929). *Kudi Arasu,* probably exaggerating, wrote, 'It appears that V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and P. Thirukootasundaram Pillai were not permitted to attend the Special Committee. Then V.O. Chidambaram Pillai walked out saying that, instead of even outsiders

getting drawn towards Saivism, the outcome of the conference was that some actually had to move out of Saivism' *(Kudi Arasu,* 7 April 1929).

Though the Saivite journals maintained silence over this affair in the beginning, later they came out with their version. M. Balasubramania Mudaliar said that V.O. Chidambaram Pillai was present during the entire course of the Subjects Committee's proceedings and that he signed the minutes and posed for the photograph in the end; further he had even argued that sporting sacred ash was not an indispensable Saivite practice. In keeping with his view, the Subjects Committee had defined the practice *(anuttanan)* as a 'general practice' *(Siddhantam,* May 1929).

Thirukootasundaram Pillai criticized the formal passing of resolutions at the general council without any debate. He was a Gandhian nationalist and had no connection with the Self-Respect Movement as such. But, as he had a zeal for reform, he participated in the conference. As the Self-Respect journals wrote in praise of his activities, he was put in a delicate situation and was forced to explain his stance *vis-à-vis* the Self-Respect Movement through a public statement. He explained that he favoured the reforms proposed by the Self-Respect Movement but not at the cost of the political freedom of the nation.

On the whole, the Tirunelveli Special Conference ended with the moderates asserting themselves. Both the conservatives and the reformists were sidelined in the battle at Tirunelveli. But the war was not yet over. A further bout had to be fought at the Thirup-pathirippuliyur conference, to which we now turn.

4. The Thiruppathirippuliyur Saivite Conference

The Tirunelveli conference had closed with the decision that the resolutions passed had to be ratified in a further conference to be held at Thiruppathirippuliyur, in the light of further discussions.

Learning from the Tirunelveli experience, rearguard action was taken to barricade the conference from Self-Respecters' infiltration. In a statement, the secretary of the conference, M. Balasubramania

Mudaliar, announced that only delegates sent by Saivite associations would have a vote: all amendments were to be submitted in writing beforehand, and finally, all those who wanted to address the conference would have to submit the written text (*Navasakti*, 8 May 1929).

The target of these restrictions and their objectives was clear. They were meant to ward off any Self-Respect threat to the hold of the moderate Saivites. P. Thirukootasundaram Pillai condemned the moves of the organizers and laid bare their motives. *Kudi Arasu* condemned these moves: 'Isn't it clear from the fact that Messrs V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, P. Thirukootasundaram Pillai and Poovalur Selvaganapathy were not permitted to attend the Saivite Conference at Tirunelveli and Thiruppathirippuliyur, that whatever we had said about the Saivite scholars and their motives in organizing the Conference is true?' *(Kudi Arasu,* 29 June 1929).

The Thiruppathirippuliyur conference was held as scheduled and went on for six long days from 16 May 1929. The conference was held with much fanfare in the Gnaniyar Mutt under the presidentship of Maraimalai Adigal. In this conference, orthodoxy raised its head once again and attempted a comeback. *Sivanesan* expressed its apprehension that the presidentship of Maraimalai Adigal, instead of Gnaniyar Adigal as contemplated earlier, would give scope for further reforms. It called for resolutions that would reflect, in its view, the true aspirations of the entire Saivite community *(Sivanesan,* April—May 1929). Rm. S. Chokkalinga Ayya of Chidambaram argued against the equality of all in the precincts of the temple. P. Muthiah Pillai continued his conservative attack by critiquing at length the presidential address of Maraimalai Adigal.

The conference finally concluded that religious reforms should be effected without prejudice to 'indispensable ancient principles', and granted quite a few concessions to the orthodox. The sporting of sacred ash which was changed to 'general practice' from 'indispensable practice' in the Tirunelveli conference was again reversed. Moreover, the clause that only those who agreed to the resolutions would get franchise was incorporated into the constitution of the Saiva Siddhanta

Mahasamajam, the apex body of all Saivite associations *(Siddhantam,* June 1929).

The Saivites thus met the challenge posed by the Self-Respect Movement. The moderates asserted themselves by granting token concessions to the conservatives and fully warded off the reformist challenge. As the entire reformist stream was given no quarter in the conference, a rival conference was called by it. The Self-Respect Saivites' conference was held on 26 May 1929, where S. Murugappa and N. Danda- pani Pillai spoke. They argued that Saivism had become a puranic religion and formal features were given priority over the substantive essence. The Tirunelveli and Thiruppathirippuliyur conferences were roundly condemned, and their resolutions, they maintained, 'would not in any way bind the true Saivites'. It was also resolved to hold the next conference at Tiruchi, and Mani. Thirunavukkarasu Mudaliar, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, P. Thirukootasundaram Pillai, K.A.P. Viswanatham, S. Gurusami, Sami Chidambaram, and S. Murugappa were elected to the reception committee. We have no further news on this conference, which in all likelihood, fizzled out. But another True Saivites conference was held on 21 July 1929 at Tirunelveli, where P Chidambaram Pillai of Nagercoil delivered a lecture on 'Self-Respect and Saivism', [9] attacking the degeneration which had set into Saivism due to the corrupting influence of Smartha Brahminism. In a desperate bid to win over the Saivites, he spoke of the Saiva-Vellalar origins of the Self-Respect Movement. He also tried to rally sober scholars like Satchidanandam Pillai by attempting to make common cause. But his strong condemnation of caste superiority and the Aryan element in Saivism, along with the advocacy of liberty, equality, and fraternity, was only bound to further alienate the Saivites. K.M. Balasubramaniam wrote on more or less similar lines, presenting the Self-Respect Saivite view in his articles in the *Revolt.*

The reformist Self-Respect Saivites were clearly marginal to the Saivite fold. Apart from their numerical minority, they also lacked ideological clarity, which further weakened them. This is also borne out by their

future career, which requires a separate study. The majority of the Saivite elite had met the challenge posed by the Self-Respect Movement on its own terms and also redefined their identity. The relationship with the non-Brahmin movement was more or less clearly delineated. Subsequently it was mainly a question of strategic alliance at times of mutual crises and common threats. Such alliances were struck in the 1930s, only to break down after the storm had blown over.

5. Saivite and Self-Respect Collaboration

The 1930s did not witness the sort of high-strung and heated conflicts between the Saivites and the Self-Respect Movement that marked the final years of the previous decade. The non-Brahmin movement, which was expanding its social base and mobilizing a far wider section of the populace than ever before, had made clear what its position was *vis- à-vis* the Saivites. The link between these two aspects deserves a more thorough study, which we shall not undertake here. Ideologically too, the Self-Respect Movement had clearly defined its stance regarding Saivism: the Saivite texts, apostles and elites were to be treated on a par with other religions, whether Aryan or non-Aryan. Religion, of whatever origin, was to be targeted from a rationalist perspective.

Gradually the critique of Saivism lost much of its sting, though it continued to be made in the pages and platforms of the SelfRespect journals and conferences. The Saivite reaction too was not as vociferous, and resolutions condemning Self-Respect propaganda were proposed more as a routine, and passed without much hype. For instance, in the Saivite conference at Thiruvennainallur in the early 1930s, a resolution was passed calling for the defence of Saivism against the 'present danger' by appointing propagandists, publishing and distributing pamphlets and booklets, and the like. Similarly, in the annual conference of the Saiva Siddhanta Mahasamajam held at Thiruvirkolam in January 1933, the questions of untouchability, caste distinctions and temple-entry were discussed, in which the impact of the encounter with the Self-Respect Movement could be felt *(Siddhantam,* January 1933).

Direct encounters between the two, which were now becoming stray, continued to be marked by heated exchanges. The Madras Provincial Tamil Conference held in June 1934 was one such instance. In the Subjects Committee of this conference presided over by T.V. Umamaheswaran Pillai, C.D. Nayagam, closely identified with the Self-Respect Movement, raised the question of the agenda right at the outset. Chavadi Kootha Nayanar wanted to bring a resolution calling for the abolition of caste, which was disallowed. Virudhai Sivagnana Yogigal posed a challenge to the Self-Respecters by saying that all Tamil works affirmed the existence of god. Someone from the crowd said that there should be scope to discuss atheism too. T.V. Umamaheswaran Pillai had to intervene and put an end to all such discussion. Later, as Maraimalai Adigal began his inaugural lecture, C.D. Nayagam raised a point of order saying, 'a conference meant to discuss Tamil should not be begun with an invocation to god.' When Adigal queried if *Thevaram* could be sung, Nayagam replied that it could be sung as music *(Kumaran,* June 1934).

Another turning point in the relationship between the two sides occurred in 1935. In that year, Maraimalai Adigal's book of essays, *Arivurai Kothu,* was prescribed as a textbook for intermediate examinations of the University of Madras. Nationalist journals like *Hindu, Dinamani, Swadesamitran* and *Ooliyan* raised a cry that one particular essay titled. 'Tamils and Westerners', was an affront to nationalist sentiment as it spoke highly of the West at the expense of Tamils. *Ooliyan* declared, 'No true son of Mother Tamil will bear to read the passages which indulge in unjustifiable praise of westerners and deride Tamils in the most repulsive terms . . . That such acts should be done in the name of non-Brahmin struggle is a shame to those who call themselves non-Brahmins' *(Ooliyan,* 9 August 1935). The nationalist press demanded the withdrawal of the book from the university syllabus.

The Self-Respect Movement, burying the hatchet and sinking its earlier differences, hastened to the defence of Maraimalai Adigal. *Kudi Arasu, Pakutharivu* and *Justice* published editorials and articles justifying Adigal's position and his constructive critique of the Tamils.

Neelavathi, writing in *Kudi Arasu*, rallied evidence from Subramania Bharati, the great nationalist Tamil poet, who had made similar observations. Kaivalyam writing in the same journal exposed the motivations behind the moves of the nationalist press and alleged that it was nothing but a Brahmin conspiracy. *Pakutharivu* compared Maraimalai Adigal favourably to U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, and drew attention to the disproportionate share of respect, fame and name that the latter had made. The burden of the Self-Respect response was that Adigal was being made the target of attack for being an erudite non-Brahmin scholar, which fact the Brahmins could not stomach. Earlier differences and bad blood were forgotten. In fact, when Maraimalai Adigal remitted some money to Periyar for the books that had been sent Periyar returned the money saying that the books were a gift.

These acts of personal goodwill were followed by a broader alliance between the Self-Respect Movement and the Saivites during the antiHindi agitation in 1937—9 (Arooran 1980). In 1937, shortly after accepting office under the Government of India Act, 1935 C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) introduced compulsory Hindi in schools. This was seen as a brazen act of imposition of a foreign language, to the detriment ofTamil language and culture. The Self-Respect Movement picked up the gauntlet and launched an agitation calling for the repeal of Hindi. The Saivite elite too, who for long had championed the Tamil cause and even proclaimed themselves as the guardians of Tamil, jumped into the fray. Both sides opposed Hindi and saw its imposition as part of a larger Brahmin conspiracy.

The Saivites conducted a number of meetings and processions to condemn Rajaji's move. Inaugurating the Tiruchi Tamil Conference, K. Subramania Pillai asserted that the entry of Hindi would spell doom to Tamil and even called for the creation of a separate Tamil province. In the Annual Saiva Siddhanta Mahasamajam Conference at Vellore held in December 1937, similar views were expressed and resolutions passed. One resolution condemned the imposition of Hindi, which was not even part of the Congress manifesto. T.V. Umamaheswaran Pillai organized condemnatory meetings under the aegis of the Karanthai Tamil Sangam in Thanjavur. The Tillai Tamil Sangam at Chidambaram,

in its first anniversary meeting, condemned compulsory Hindi. Prominent Saivite Tamil scholars like N. Kandaswamy Pillai, Pandithamani M. Kathiresan Chettiar and S. Somasundara Bharati participated in this conference. At Thiruvai- yaru, R. Venkatachalam Pillai led a rally of students of the Sentamil College on 31 August 1937. He also organized a meeting in November 1937, in which S. Somasundara Bharati, T.V. Umamaheswaran Pillai and K.A.P. Viswanatham spoke. The Saivite elite in their traditional stronghold ofTirunelveli organized an association called Tamil Pathu- kappu Kazhagam (Tamil Protection Association) to fight Hindi. Doyens of the Saivite world M.V Nellaiyappa Pillai, M.S. Purnalin- gam Pillai, Punnaivananatha Mudaliar, K. Appadurai and V. Thiru- varangam Pillai were active in this association. The association also published a number of pamphlets. V. Thiruvarangam Pillai, who was the moving spirit behind it, published a number of anti-Hindi writings in *Sentamil Selvi,* the Tamil research journal run by him. Scholars like Maraimalai Adigal, Sivananda Adigal, M.V. Nellaiyappa Pillai, Arul Thangaiah, Devaneya Pavanar and Ilavalaganar contributed extensively to the above journal.

It was in the context of the anti-Hindi campaign that the Self-Respect Movement sought to forge an open alliance with the Saivites. Its call to the Saivite world was marked by statements meant to provoke them into an active alliance, which also sheds light on the actual nature of the relationship then existing between the two. *Kudi Arasu* exhorted the heads of the powerful Saivite mutts: 'We will forget all that you have done before. Bravely come forward now; apart from providing pecuniary help, you should also send your devotees to our side . . .' *(KudiArasu,* 8 May 1938). Again, in another editorial, *Kudi Arasu*, calling for the unity of all Tamils, dubbed the imposition of Hindi as an insult to Saivism. It went on to elaborate:

> It can be generally said that if the Tamil people have tumbled into the Aryan trap and are unable to extricate themselves, it is because the Saivites are assisting the Aryans . . . It was because of this that Aryans achieved dominance in Tamil society through religion . . . To this day, it is the Saivites who act as Hanumans in maintaining this dominance. We ask them, should they not expiate for their past acts.

> There is no doubt that the ruthless rule of Achariar [Rajaji] will come to an end the very day that true Saivites attain at least an iota of self-respect and fight against their 'Satsudra' status. And if Achariar is able to indulge in ruthless and foolhardy acts it is because he is certain that Saivites will not attain such consciousness easily. *(Kudi Arasu,* 29 May 1938)

We notice here a shrewd mix of incitement and encouragement to both provoke and exhort Saivites to join hands with the Self-Respect Movement to oppose Hindi. The basis on which the alliance was sought was anti-Brahminism and a threat to the Tamil language.

An article in *Kudi Arasu* reminded the Saivites of the hue and cry they had raised against the Self-Respect Movement in the late 1920s, and asked sarcastically what they were going to do when the Brahmins were attacking Tamil which had been begotten by Lord Siva himself. M.R. Mithiran of Dindigul wrote an epistle in verse form to Maraimalai Adigal requesting him to jump into the fray and join hands with S. Somasundara Bharati in the fight against Hindi.

The call of the Self-Respecters did not go unheeded. On the occasion of the annual celebrations at the Thiruppathirippuliyur mutt in June 1938, Gnaniyar Adigal, when asked about the introduction of Hindi, said: 'A thousand years ago, Sanskrit came to Tamilnadu. We welcomed it . . . A few centuries ago, English came. We said, 'Welcome' and showed warm hospitality. What did we gain? Slowly these two languages devoured our Tamil language. *Now Hindi too is coming. Moreover it is going to be mandatory. Let it come and stay. Let Tamil lovers be abettors to this!' (Navasakti,* 17 June 1938: original emphasis).

Such moving words uttered by a venerated scholar—saint could not be easily ignored. Even Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, opposed to the anti-Hindi agitation as it undermined the nationalist cause, was forced to publish this speech in his *Navasakti.*

An alliance between Saivites and the Self-Respect Movement was marked by a series of joint meetings and conferences. At the third Self-Respect Conference in Thuraiyar in August 1937, Periyar,

Ponnambalanar, K.M. Balasubramaniam, C.N. Annadurai, and K.A.P. Viswanatham spoke. In Madras, S. Somasundara Bharati, C.N. Annadurai, and K.M. Balasubramaniam addressed an antiHindi meeting. K.M. Balasubramaniam, K.A.P. Viswanatham, and C.N. Annadurai addressed the third Salem District Self-Respect Conference in October 1937. S. Somasundara Bharati went on an extended lecture tour ofTamil Nadu calling for the repeal of compulsory Hindi. At Tirunelveli, C.N. Annadurai spoke on the platform of the Tamil Pathukappu Kazhagam in October 1937, with M.S. Purna- lingam Pillai in the chair, S. Somasundara Bharati as a co-speaker, and M.V. Nellaiyappa Pillai proposing a vote of thanks. The third Madras Provincial Conference at Tiruchi in December 1937 contained a fair proportion of Self-Respect leaders like Periyar, C.N. Annadurai, Gurusami and Kunchitham. So was the Ramanathapuram District Tamil Conference held in December 1938.

The Saivite journals were open to the Self-Respecters and vice versa. The proceedings of the anti-Hindi agitation were reported at length, especially of the Saivite meetings, by Self-Respect journals. Ezhathu Sivananda Adigal, on behalf of the Self-Respect Movement, printed and distributed 15,000 free copies of Maraimalai Adigal's English booklet, 'Why Hindi should not be made the Lingua Franca of India' *(MAD,* 3 November 1937). The agitation against compulsory Hindi manifested views that both the Self-Respect Movement and the Saivites shared. A classic instance would be the inaugural lecture that T.V. Umamaheswaran Pillai delivered at the Tiruchi Tamil Conference in December 1937. Harking back to the great antiquity of Tamils, he ascribed their fall to Aryan conspiracy. The brazen actions of the Congress ministry and the vanity of Rajaji were identified with Brahminism and roundly condemned.

But the consensus that had been forged had its limits. The Self-Respect Movement's objectives were far-reaching, and the alliance with the Saivites was arrived only on an anti-Brahmin platform to defend a commonly perceived threat to Tamil. The limits were clear even during the honeymoon. At the Tiruchi conference Periyar brought a resolution saying that the conference had lost confidence in the Governor of

Madras as he had signed the Congress bill on Hindi. Many developed cold feet and Periyar's resolution had to be dropped *(Kudi Arasu,* 23 January 1938). A deputation to meet the Governor was then proposed. Periyar declined to be part of this deputation as he felt that the Governor would not intervene in this matter as the British had nothing to lose in this matter.

This incident dramatically highlights the ambit of the consensus. The Self-Respect Movement had far-reaching goals, and the antiHindi agitation was only one issue in its programme, and was not an end in itself as it was for the Saivites. Moreover, given its political experience, it was not averse to using coercive agitational tactics to achieve its programme. The Saivite elite could never think beyond safe, constitutional methods. It was only a sense of crisis and the threat of a common danger that had led to their alliance. With the Congress relinquishing office after the outbreak of the Second World War and the repeal of compulsory Hindi, the stage was once again set for conflict between the two.

The first of such conflicts in the immediate aftermath of the anti-Hindi agitation was the Tamil Marriage Conference. As part of its larger programme for a socially just and egalitarian society, the marriage system also came under the Self-Respect Movement's attack. The prevailing system of marriages was condemned as patriarchal, Aryan, devised to serve the needs of Brahmin priests. To this system, the Self-Respect Movement counterposed a new form of marriage which emphasized the contractual nature of the relationship and the equality of man and woman in it. This new system did away with Brahmin officiation, rituals, and even the *thali,* the wedding chain which the bride was expected to wear around her neck all through her life (Anandhi 1991; Pandian *et al.* 1991).

While the anti-Brahmin nature of Self-Respect marriage was welcome to the Saivites, its other aspects, especially the anti-religious and anti-patriarchal content, were anathema. In July 1939, a Tamil Marriage Conference was conducted in Madras. Presided over by Maraimalai Adigal, the speakers included K. Subramania Pillai, S.

Somasundara Bharati, and T.V. Umamaheswaran Pillai, the very Saivites who were in the vanguard of the anti-Hindi agitation. In the conference it was emphasized that present-day marriages were full of embellishments introduced by Aryan Brahmins after their infiltration into Tamil society. [10] The ancient Tamil practice of marriage, based on love, was to be emulated. Brahmin officiation and Sanskrit incantations were to be abolished. Simple marriages, in the presence of elders, by the tying of the *thali*, was to be the basis of the Tamil system of marriage *(Kumaran,* 27 July 1939).

In 1940, the Saivites organized the Tamilar Samaya Manadu (Conference of Tamil Religion). Here too, Maraimalai Adigal, S.S. Bharati, and K. Subramania Pillai gave shape to the Saivite response. The SelfRespect Movement interpreted the pre-Aryan Tamil society in secular terms. A golden age of a harmonious society, devoid of religion and caste, was portrayed as the ideal that was to be recreated. The Saivite conception went only halfway. Pre-Aryan Tamil society in their view was a Vellalar civilization. Saivism was its religion. Caste distinctions based on birth, rituals, and priesthood were Aryan accretions. Some of the best elements of Aryan—Brahminism were actually the product of Tamil genius which had been appropriated from Saivism (Adigal 1927; Pillai 1940). These views were put forward in the conference and colonial Hindu laws were condemned for their Aryan bias. During the course of the conference some Self-Respect activists stormed in and tried to debate the resolutions, causing chaos. The Self-Respect Movement also responded in writing to the Saivite view expressed in the conference.

The incidents of Self-Respecters gatecrashing into Saivite meetings were more or less regular affairs, and were seen more as a nuisance than as real challenges to the Saivite view. For instance, at the Salem Sentamil Conference, presided over by Maraimalai Adigal in October 1944, R. Neduncheliyan 'spoke insultingly of Saiva religion and temple worship and offended the audience which rose against him. He and his self-respecters caused great commotion' *(MAD,* 2 October 1944). In 1943, when the Self-Respect Movement launched a campaign to burn publicly

the Kamba Ramayanam and the Periya Puranam, the Saivite reaction was a muted echo of the late 1920s. Pandithamani Kathiresan Chettiar released a statement condemning the move in strong terms. And when an open debate between the Self-Respect leaders and Saivite scholars was organized in early 1943, C.N. Annadurai and Ezhathu Adigal confronted S. Somasundara Bharati and R.P. Sethu Pillai. While the brunt of the attack was against the Kamba Ramayanam, the Saivite classic *Periya Puranam* received only token mention. Moreover, S.S. Bharati and R.P. Sethu Pillai defended the classics not in religious/ Saivite terms but more or less purely on literary and aesthetic grounds. Anna carried the day with his youthful exuberance and novel style of elocution. Clearly the Saivite question had ceased to be an issue. Yet the fact remains: the stalwarts of the anti-Hindi agitation, who once shared a common platform, now crossed swords.

6. Conclusion

The discussion of the Self-Respect Movement and the Saivite elite suggests that a one-to-one matching of the Saivites and the Dravidian movement is untenable and does not even deserve the description of being reductionist. With the launching of the Self-Respect Movement in the mid-1920s, the gulf between the Saivite elite and the nonBrahmin movement widened enormously. The differences between the two were predominantly ideological, which rattled the Saivites into rethinking their religion, philosophy, and politics. The discussions within the Saivite fold crystallized and came to the fore under the impact of the Self-Respect Movement. While the non-Brahmin movement did have its ideological genesis in the intellectual output of the Saivite elite, the roots of the Self-Respect Movement did not draw solely from this, and even when it did, it gave an entirely radical interpretation which terrified the Saivites.

Even when both shared an anti-Brahminism, there was wide divergence over what it meant. The Saivites preferred a sectarian interpretation to anti-Brahminism, harking back to a pre-Aryan Tamil society where the Vellalars occupied a pre-eminent position. In this conception of ancient Tamil society, Saivites replaced Brahmins, and

their scriptures replaced the Vedas. Even caste remained, though it was only occupation-based and no stigma was attached to it.

In comparison to this, the Self-Respect version was revolutionary. In its view ancient Tamil society was egalitarian and democratic. There was neither religion nor caste. Perfect equality prevailed. The disintegration of this ideal society was seen to be the result of Brahmin incursion into Tamil country and all the ills of a caste-ridden and religious society were attributed to this. In many ways this reminds us of the notion of 'Norman Yoke' which was held by the radicals during the English Revolution: the fall of merry England was seen to be the result of the Norman invasion. This notion possessed immense radical potential during the seventeenth century and impelled the English to insurgency (Hill 1986). Further, when the Tamil classical canon was constructed in a counter-hegemonic move in the 1940s, the Dravidian movement was able to exclude religious texts, which in the Tamil context mostly consisted of Saivite works.

The late 1940s and 1950s saw a further widening of the social base of the Dravidian movement, with the Dravida Munnetra Kazha- gam (DMK) joining electoral politics. Consequently, it has, in post-independence Tamil Nadu, created an ambience to contest the still-powerful Brahmin hegemony and has also delivered a share of political power to backward castes. [11] Thus, the Saivite question in the Dravidian movement would now seem to be of little more than academic interest, if not for the fact that recent researchers have once again raised the bogey of Vellalar dominance.

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16

Intimations of Equality

Shrines and Politics in Malabar 1900-1924 *

DILIP M. MENON

Caste inequality, unlike the Baker confronted by the Snark, has not softly and suddenly vanished away in the face either of modernization or of determined academic writing. Rural relations of hierarchy and dependence have survived despite the onslaught of a market economy. If anything, issues have become more complicated, and a welter of identities characterize social relations and infect the trajectory of political discourse. And the long march from caste to class is far from complete. This paper is concerned with two related issues—the creation of identities and their transformation. Notions of identity and community are studied as transient categories emphasized within particular contexts, rather than as something intent awaiting realization. We look at two specific contexts: the enaction of rural religious festivals within a hierarchical caste society, and the projection of the idea of a community of equals by lower- caste movements and, subsequently, nationalism. Social and political movements sought to create broader identifications—of caste, religion, and nationality—in the attempt to break free from what they saw as structures of inequality rooted in local contexts. In the process,

conceptions of rural relations, labour, and religious worship underwent considerable modification, if not transformation. It is significant that all these attempts to redefine status expressed themselves in a religious idiom, stemming from a recognition that religious practices almost as much as economic ones constitute the individual in society. Even within *home economicus* may lurk a devout heart.

Nayar *Tharavadu* and the Organisation of Production

The East India Company wrested Malabar from Tipu Sultan in 1792, but it was not until 1806, with the defeat of the Pazhassi raja, that the last flicker of resistance was quelled. Nayar *tharavadu,* or matrilineal households, had managed to carve out areas of influence with the opening up of forests following the warfare of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. [1] In north Malabar, agricultural production and settlement came to be centred on dominant families which had pioneered cultivation and established a tenuous, and therefore, furiously defended, control over wasteland. Over the nineteenth century, the legal profile of the Nayar *tharavadu* was consolidated, and it came to be defined as an impartible and co-residential unit (eventually decided by the Madras High Court in 1867). [2] The younger members were entitled to maintenance from the income of the *tharavadu* from its lands. Therefore, in north Malabar, where land was available for colonization and profits from pepper were high, *tharavadu* continued to expand into the interior by setting up branches called *tavazhis,* each tracing descent from a female member of the parent *tharavadu*. Such branches were allocated land on improving tenures, and they constituted the cutting edge of the extension of cultivation.

The expansion of dominant *tharavadu* into the interior brought them into contact with the shifting cultivation practised by tribal groups who produced hill-rice and pepper on the foothills. Their random, migratory cultivation was brought under the control of Nayar *tharavadu* under a system called *cherikallu.* Younger members of the *tharavadu* were allotted an expanse of forest and, with a Maniyani tribal as supervisor, trees were cleared for the cultivation of pepper and hill

rice. [3] Shifting cultivators who were not part of the *cherikallu* system changed their designation according to the name of the *tharavadu* from which they had leased their land. Subordinate labouring groups were closely identified with the dominant families they worked for. However, in a context of land availability, this implied more a temporary association for obtaining loans and grain subsidies than a permanent dissolution of identity. Vettuvar tribals worked on the coconut plantations of Nayars and other castes and were sometimes employed on the fields during the harvest. They observed death pollution for a period of fifteen days if working on a Nayar's gardens and for ten days if on a Nambudiri's. Their identities were seen as being coterminous with that of their landlords. But again, this depended on whom they were working for at a particular juncture. These tribal groups could leave if treated harshly, and their lack of 'loyalty' to their masters made their names *(nambuvettuvar)* 'synonymous with ingratitude', according to Panikkar, an early amateur anthropologist. [4] Systematic encroachment on the preserves of the tribals, combined with the attempts at forest conservancy by the government, had already caused the migration of families of tribals northwards to Mysore and Coorg. [5]

Rural settlement tended to be centred on a Nayar or Tiyya *tharavadu,* and the lands and labourers it commanded. More specifically, the word *tharavadu* meant the family house, the land where the ashes of the ancestors lay (which was usually within the compound of the house). [6] It incorporated both the immediate members of the *tharavadu* and labourers working on its lands who were identified with the *tharavadu* they worked for. Around each major *tharavadu* there were families of oil-pressers, washer-people, potters, and barbers who held hereditary rights and privileges in the produce as well as the family and local shrine. [7] Traditionally, Nayar *tharavadu* charged a tax called *kudicillara* which was collected on the implements of the profession of potters, blacksmiths, and other artisans. [8] Some of the dominant Nayar *tharavadu* had Tiyya retainers called *adiyans* who rendered service in personal quarrels, acted as the private armies of landlords, and 'policed' the castes below them to prevent any infringement of caste mores. [9]

Alongside the exercise of authority, *tharavadu* espoused a paternalist benevolence towards lower-caste dependants. During the new-year festival of Vishu, in the month of April, Nayar families made a great show of generosity in which dependants were given presents of grain, cloth, and money. Donations, and the sharing, of grain were a theme running through religious festivals as well. The guarantee of subsistence was the premise of a negotiated sense of community in a region deficient in foodgrains. Labourers were expected to make presents of their produce as an expression of allegiance. Reciprocity was not symmetrical and dependants could be evicted from holdings or, in extreme cases, killed if such tokens of fealty were not given. [10] Such instances were either more or less evident according to the nature of relations between a particular *tharavadu* and its dependants. It is significant that the incidence of petty crime, and the practice of 'black magic' by untouchable castes, was minimal in villages where *tharavadu* were regarded as 'benevolent'. [11]

The connection between work and status was most clearly evident in the case of the untouchable castes of Pulayas and Cherumas who mainly worked on the paddy fields. They were named by the *tharavadu* to which they were attached. At best a Pulayan would be called by a name like Panjan, meaning someone who works on wetlands, and at worst by names which meant 'nothing', which produced its own ambivalences, particularly in their perceived association with 'black magic'. The Parayas, at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, were regarded as powerful magicians, and were consulted by all castes in matters relating to thefts and the killing of enemies. [13] Magic was a sphere of activity in which the Parayan outranked even the Nambu- diri Brahmans, some of whom practised sorcery without a loss in status. [14]

The economy of north Malabar in the three decades prior to the Depression of the 1930s was characterized by two trends. The first was the growth of a class of entrepreneurial small cultivators, premised on the availability of land and the high prices of cash crops, like coconut and pepper. The second trend, later heightened by the Depression, was the increasing dependence of these cultivators on the large landowning

tharavadu of the region both for subsistence as well as access to land. North Malabar was a region deficient in foodgrains, a fact which had been accentuated by the conversion of wetlands to cash cropping in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The production of subsistence crops like paddy came to be concentrated in the hands of a few, large, landowning *tharavadu,* whose granaries underpinned their authority. Control exercised by the *tharavadu* over wastelands and forests introduced a further element of dependence. [15]

Landlords in Malabar were given wider control over wastelands and forests than elsewhere in the Presidency. In the landmark Olappamana case of 1916, the ownership of non-tidal and non-navigable rivers was vested in the owners of the banks on either side of the river. [16] In the years before the Depression, control over the ancillaries of agriculture did not necessarily mean that landlords were able to liberate themselves from the bonds of community and custom. Rights over land were constantly being contested with other landholders and recalcitrant tenants who refused to forgo their customary interests in the land. Migration always existed as an option. After cultivating fields in July and August, many labourers migrated to the plantations in Coorg and returned soon before the harvest. [17] Migrants from Malabar—presumably mainly untouchables and lower castes—made up some three-fifths of the outsiders working in Cochin, where they often became permanent residents. [18]

With the prices of pepper and coconut soaring in the 1920s, the small cultivator producing for the market came to the fore. This degree of integration into the market did not necessarily mean the undermining of patronal, reciprocal relations between large *tharavadu* and dependant labourers and cultivators. [19] Given the nature of the fluctuating profits from cash crops, determined by the vagaries of international demand, which financed the import of rice into the region, [20] cultivators relied on the *tharavadu* for the provision of subsistence. This underlay a sense of rural community, fraught with tension, in which cultivators expected that they would be provided for in a time of food crisis, and allowed

access to agricultural resources. This expectation was offset by the ability, or the willingness, of *tharavadu* to fulfil their obligations. [21]

To sum up, the *tharavadu* was involved in a network of relationships with a welter of agrarian entities—shifting cultivators, tenant cultivators on homesteads, artisanal groups who held land in return for services, ritual performers who held rent-free land from shrines or temples managed by *tharavadu,* and untouchable castes who worked on the paddy fields. The latter's dependence on the *tharavadu* ranged from the peripheral (cash and seed advances) as in the case of the shifting cultivators, to the absolute as in the case of the untouchable castes. At the centre of these fluctuating relations stood the *pathayapura* 'granary' of the *tharavadu,* representing the possibility of a still point in a chaotic world. [22] The promise of sustenance represented as much the idea of a 'share' in the crop as a rational consideration on the part of the *tharavadu* to secure labour at a time of availability of land and shortage of a workforce. It would be sentimental to speak in terms of a 'golden age' of labour, as any notion of 'rights' and 'shares' was hard fought for and won, often temporarily.

Shrines and Religious Culture

The current orthodoxy on religious festivals in South India tends to see them both as a microcosm of social relations and as the means by which such relations are reproduced. Rules of caste hierarchy and behaviour are elaborated at temple festivals which then help to keep the 'system', so to speak, functioning. Within temple rituals, specific functions are allocated to castes which signify their position in the hierarchy. The relation between the deity and the worshippers parallels and is the model for the relation between higher and lower castes and more generally between superior and inferior. [23] Too little attention has been paid to Stein's judicious formulation that a temple is a 'complex and *transitory* outcome of an extraordinary range of relationships'. [24] An argument needs to be constructed which allows for dissonance and difference, and assumes that individuals may be involved in several religious and social practices, not all of which purvey the unitary idea

of a hierarchical society. Some religious festivals may assert, at particular junctures, hierarchy and the interdependence of castes. Others may convey an altogether different conception of social relations.

The assumption of the existence of options within any given 'system', in which a host of identities is asserted and transformed at different points in time, would make our understanding of social change more nuanced. We shall look at community worship around shrines in the context of the articulation of social relations as well as of the formation of identities. Looking at a religious culture which is shared by both upper and lower castes but understood, and appropriated, differently over time, will help in historicizing the experience of culture. [25] We shall consider the community of worshippers around local shrines in north Malabar, supported by dominant Nayar and Tiyya families and the other castes living around the shrine.

A major Nayar family usually held management rights over seve-ral temples, each of which was supported by lands endowed for its maintenance. [26] Tenants paid their rents in paddy; and the priest, ritual dancer, drummer, and other officiants were maintained out of these payments, with a certain share going to the Nayar household. The sphere of overlordship, *melkoyma,* was knitted with the rights to *uraima* —the right of regulating and administering the affairs of the local temples and shrines. Control over a temple did not mean only control over an imagined or actual community of worshippers; it also meant access to the stocks of grain a temple commanded, thus underwriting the authority of a family. Shrines and temples amassed considerable stocks; the annual rent at one of the temples of the Koothali Nayar in Kurumbranad was well over 32,000 bushels of grain. [27]

The basic distinction between temples *(kshetrams)* and shrines *(kavus)* was that only the Nayar landholders and Nambudiri Brahmans were allowed to pray at the former. *Kavus* were of various kinds, but generally they were the focus of worship of a community of lower and upper castes, within a region defined by the overlordship of the dominant family or families managing the shrine. Shrines were the

characteristic site of worship, and in 1881, of the 240 religious institutions belonging to superior castes, only 45 were to be found in north Malabar. [28] A large majority of the temples was owned by individual families or managed by the heads of dominant families *(uralar)* in the vicinity. [29] The Koothali Nayar, one of the big landowners of Kurumbranad, had the right of overlordship over four temples, and the tenants who held paddy lands from these temples paid their rent in kind. The settlement register for Karivellur in 1904 gives the details of lands held by twelve temples and eleven shrines. Both service and ritual castes were given wet or garden lands on rent-free *janmam* to maintain themselves. [30] Some of the temples belonging to dominant families were private temples in the sense that only members of the extended family could and did worship there. Officiants at these temples were usually senior members of the family who gave themselves up to religious contemplation after having led a full life. [31] In other family temples, annual ceremonies were held, at which all the castes were permitted to attend, and alcohol and meat were considered a part of the religious celebration. On such occasions alone, Brahman priests officiated and used fish and toddy in the rituals. Since most of the temples were devoted to Siva or *shakti,* the use of alcohol and meat was common. [32]

Very often, the deity at a family temple (Siva, Vishnu or Bhagavathi) was merged with a local deity. This was typically a corollary of the expansion of the frontiers of cultivation by *tharavadu.* At Pandit-code, in a temple managed by the Koothali family, the tribal goddess of the mountains, Payyoramala *paradevata,* was worshipped alongside Siva. Questions of cognition are difficult to resolve, but it is possible that over a period of time these two entities might have merged. Siva would have become as much a folk deity as the Payyoramala *devata* was a goddess of the Nayars. This merging of the gods of the uppercaste landholders with those of the lower-caste or tribal adherents was evident. In every Nayar household, some form of ancestor worship was practised, the most common being the setting apart of a room in the house as the abode of the ancestors. The symbol of the ancestor—a sword if the

person had been of a martial temperament, and beads and slippers if they had been spiritually oriented—was worshipped in an outhouse, with one of the males of the family acting as priest. Sometimes, these family shrines were thrown open to the public if offerings to the ancestor were seen as effective in preventing or curing diseases. In times of epidemics (smallpox continued to be prevalent in Malabar as late as the 1940s), the shrine of the Nayar ancestor and therefore the household itself became a focus of the community. [33]

Some Nayar households set up an ancestor in a local shrine merging the family cult with a local cult. The reverse could happen when local heroes and heroines, usually lower-caste victims of perceived injustice at the hands of members of the household, were deified and worshipped along with Nayar ancestors. [34] Thus, at the same time as Nayar households attempted to increase their sphere of authority by transposing their ancestors in local shrines, they themselves had constantly to attest their legitimacy by 'atoning' for excesses committed. Deceased ancestors, local heroes and heroines, gods of the Vedic pantheon, and nature gods all rubbed shoulders in a seamless web of worship. Shared worship defined a sense of community to some extent but the dissonances were evident, making a feeling of fraternity transitory. The deification of local victims of injustice clearly indicated the asymmetry in access to power. At the same time, the limits of the exercise of power were defined. The shrines were the locus of the articulation of relations of power as well as its contestation. If lower castes were beginning to worship higher deities, upper castes had to acknowledge lower deities, and a community of worship was sustained by this tension between integration and further expansion. [35] Historians and anthropologists, working within different theoretical paradigms, accept that lower-caste culture consists of replication and imitation of the dominant culture of the upper castes. [36] Looking at the whole process of the formation, expansion, and interminigling of the shrines of Nayar ancestors, goddesses, and local heroes and heroines, the social order seems far more dynamic and less amenable to a subsuming theory.

Religious Festivals and Social Relations

We shall now look at three kinds of festival. In the first, the possibility of a community of equals was stressed over difference. A community of interdependent yet unequal castes around dominant Nayar households and local shrines was emphasized in the second. In the third, the premise of power underlying social relations was recognized and the excessive deployment of authority was criticized.

The festival at the shrine in Kottiyur provides an illustration of the first kind. The Kottiyur shrine was kept closed throughout the year except for a brief period between 15 May and 11 June. Situated in the Wynaad foothills, the shrine was virtually inaccessible in the months of July and August because the severe monsoon caused mountain streams to flood and submerge the shrine. The shrine was managed by a few Nayar families in the vicinity. Pilgrims who travelled there were of all castes and initially followed an order of precedence; the Nayars arrived first, followed by the Tiyyas, and so on. Between 21 and 24 May, the Tiyyas would bring the traditional offering of tender coconuts and pots of toddy. On the way to the shrine it was customary to 'insult anyone they came across' and cause damage to property beside the pilgrimage route.

Once the Nayars, Tiyyas, and other castes reached the shrine, they abused one another, sang bawdy songs, and occasionally came to blows. Worship was tempered with gaiety as the pots of toddy were diverted for secular consumption. [37] A similar festival was held in the month of April at the Kodungallur temple in the neighbouring state of Cochin. Nayars and lower castes from north Malabar made a pilgrimage to the temple, and once there drank alcohol, sacrificed cocks and goats, and sang lewd songs about the goddess of the temple as well as hapless passers-by. A reformer's pamphlet of the early twenties revels in descriptions of drunken orgies laced with sexual innuendo. [38]

Before the Kottiyur festival began, a Tiyya would perform worship at the shrine; only after this were Nayars and Nambudiris allowed inside. The chief representative of the Nambudiris paid a certain amount of

money as *dakshina* (offering) to the Tiyya priest and received charge of the temple from him. On the last day of the festival, a washerman performer in the guise of the mountain god Muthappan 'arrived' near Kottiyur and was received by a Nambudiri priest who offered him sandalwood paste. [39] The caste hierarchy seemingly was stood on its head here, and upper castes could worship only after receiving permission from a Tiyya. Similarly, a washerman, exalted on account of being possessed by a deity (significantly, a non-Brahmanical deity), was temporarily superior to a Brahman. The specific context blurred questions of hierarchy and allowed for the adoption of roles which did not replicate everyday norms of behaviour. The Nambudiri Brahman offered *dakshina* to a Tiyya, reversing the kind of 'transaction' usually seen as obtaining between 'higher' and 'lower', in which 'grosser material elements go up' from those of lower status and 'more refined symbolic elements go down' from those of higher status. [40]

If these festivals were occasions in which the relationship between castes bore little resemblance to the presumed hierarchy, another characteristic was that there was no presumed community around the shrines. Both at Kottiyur and Kodungallur, the imagined terrain of worshippers theoretically embraced all of Malabar. In the crowds which surged to these festivals anonymity was the key feature, and joint participation as pilgrims the unifying factor. At festivals associated with particular shrines in the countryside, there was less anonymity and the premise was of different castes working together. If, in the case of the pilgrimage, it was worship and licence which bound together the participants, at local shrines it was a community of worship and of sustenance in dearth. As both these aggregates were transitory and had as a background the unequal relations of power, the identities adopted in the duration of such festivals were necessarily temporary as well. The roles performed by different castes in the rituals associated with temple festivals emphasized their casteness, so to speak, but it was, probably, only within the community of worship that such identities were retained.

The temple festival at Pishari *kavu,* near the port town of Quilandy in Kurumbranad, illustrates the second kind of festival, which reiterated both caste identity and community. Pishari *kavu* is an instance of a local shrine which, over a period of time, has come to be controlled by Nayars, but yet retains the title of *kavu* because all castes participate in its festival. In the temple, worship was done by a Mussad (Nambudiri), and entry was prohibited to castes below the Nayars. However, during temple festivals, washermen, tribals, and oracles were an integral part of the ceremonies. Most of the ritual officiants and religious performers held rent-free land from the temple, and the annual yield from the small plots provided a bare subsistence.

During the course of the festival, each caste performed the role traditionally associated with them—the blacksmith repaired the temple sword, the umbrella-maker supplied umbrellas, the fisher-people brought salt from the coast, and the Tiyyas brought coconut and toddy. In one sense, their participation in different capacities in the ritual could have meant the establishment of a direct connection between work and status. Equally, the community of worship and of subsistence which sustained the temple was asserted. It was quite common for the temples to be supported by the donations of produce from worshippers, particularly in festivals coinciding with the harvest in April. At the main temple in Taliparamba, the *puttari* festival was held after each harvest. Worshippers of all castes and tenants of the temple or of the managing families would bring offerings of grain and vegetables. [41]

The devotees received quantities of rice as offerings from the temple and the Nayar households of the locality donated rice to the temple. Festival processions took a definite route which embraced the presumed sphere of religious authority of the temple and the secular authority of the Nayar families. Every temple festival was thus a reiteration of the community of worship as well as of subsistence, marked by the giving and receiving of paddy. Just as the roles performed by each of the castes were emphasized, so was the duty of the Nayar household and the temple to provide for the community of worshippers. It would be simplistic to argue that such temple festivals reiterated and reproduced

caste hierarchy or caste identity for they were but one of the several religious practices that individuals were involved in. Moreover, it would be possible to argue even in the case of the 'service castes' that their participation in the temple festivals emphasized more their dependence on the dominant families than their 'caste' status. [42]

It is worth stressing here that the network of reciprocal relations around the shrines was not premised solely on the ability of the *tharavadu* or the shrines to provide sustenance. A congregation was guaranteed both by the statement of devotion to the deity and by the fact that there was a residual component of regard for the *tharavadu* itself regardless of its fortunes. Two examples will suffice. In 1939, shrines belonging to the Koothali *tharavadu* were escheated after the death of the last living member of the family. Within the year, there were petitions from the local inhabitants to the Collector asking for the shrine festivals to be restored. [43] In the second instance, the Ecchikanam *tharavadu* was in the doldrums, hit hard by the Depression as well as by the partition of its properties. Its head, A.C. Kannan Nayar, was dependent on the charity of his Congress associates. In 1947, he recorded in his diary the holding of a religious festival at his shrine from which he realised a 'profit' of Rs 475 from donations made by worshippers. [44] We need to reconsider the view that rural social structures, of both authority and co-operation, fell apart in the course of the Depression, since the impecuniousness of landed elites rendered them incapable of performing erstwhile functions of credit or sustenance. [45] Rural society appears to be bound together by affective as much as 'rational' economic considerations on the part of its constituents.

Temple festivals were marked by the accent on interdependence and caste identity. Pilgrimages aspired to submerge caste identity. The ritual dance called the *teyyattam* had elements of both. The *teyyattam* was performed at shrines managed exclusively by Tiyya families, service castes, fisher-people, and untouchable castes like the Pulayas. Nayar landlords of the immediate locality were deemed to be members of the religious community, and though they never worshipped at these

shrines, they had an important role to play in the annual festivals. The *teyyattam* was performed at shrines mainly by washermen and Malayan and Munnuttan tribals. It was a performance which incorporated the telling of the story of a lower- or upper-caste victim of perceived injustice as well as the circumstances of their deification. Shrines grew up around these deified victims who were never worshipped in person but incorporated within local cults, existing Bhagavathi shrines or the worship of ancestors in Nayar households. Performances were always localized geographically, and, if the plot of land where a *teyyattam* was performed was sold, it was up to the new purchaser to continue holding the ceremony. [46] This level of shrines served as physical markers of an imagined area of community as well as reminders of the ever-present relations of power.

The incorporation of local heroes, the ancestors of the Nayar families, and the Bhagavathi in the sphere of worship defined a cosmology particular to every household-shrine complex. The distinctive form of worship at these shrines also emphasised the conviviality of the religious community. Toddy and meat were an essential part of the ceremonies and very often the performer himself was stoked up with alcohol. The essential spiritual ideal in all the ceremonies seems to have been not so much the transcendence of the world as enjoyment within it.

During a performance of the *teyyattam,* the performer *(kolam)* was possessed by the spirit of the local hero or heroine who had been deified as a form of the *Bhagavathi* or Siva. While the *kolam* was waiting to be possessed by the deity, the *thottam* was sung relating the circumstances of the life and death of the deified victims. The word *thottam* is derived from the word *thonnuka,* meaning to create. [47] At times, the performer himself was called the *thottam,* no distinction being made between the creator and his creation. During the space of the performance, the hero or heroine was brought alive in the body of the *kolam,* who was at the same time possessed by the deity. The *kolam* therefore, was at the same time human as well as divine; the creator as well as the creation; lower caste as well as a god. While in a state of

possession, he castigated the upper-caste members of the audience for acts of commission and omission towards their servants or labourers. In a sense the performance was a lengthy rebuke; the retelling of the story of the unjust killing of a person of lower caste was a criticism of the power exercised by upper castes in general. During the period of the performance, Nambudiri and Nayar landlords would seek the advice of the performer as it was believed that his prophecies as well as his curses came true. [48]

An important strand which emerges from the *teyyattam* is that of a notion of a moral community—a recognition of mutual spaces and the resentment of the arbitrary exercise of power. Neither the dominant households nor their labourers or dependent castes, or indeed the amorphous community of worshippers were expected to transgress certain limits. It is significant that *thottams* usually began with the performer saying, 'I do not know the name of the village [where the incident happened] that I could inform or enlighten you. I do not know the name of the person.' [49] This stanza, taken from the *thottam* of Vishnumurti (an incarnation of Vishnu) into which is woven the story of a Tiyya youth murdered by a Nayar landlord, is suggestive. It is as if there is an incipient understanding of the fact that regardless of the person or place, a Tiyya or Pulaya would have experienced the oppression of a landlord. Moreover, by not specifying a person or place, the story carried by the wandering Malayan performer would begin to assume the status of a 'type', allowing for a filling-in of detail in different localities. A collective memory of incidents was created, scattered in time and place, but flattened into the moment of the performance.

We have been looking at three different creations of community. The first was premised on a conflation of caste identities at the festivals at Kottiyur and Kodungallur. The second laid emphasis on the interdependence of the various castes as well as the community of worshippers premised on religion and subsistence. The third was a more fragile sense of community premised on unequal relations of power. This was recognized in the deification of lower-caste victims. The limits put on individual actions which facilitated the continuance of

community were set out at the same time. What was common to all three was the absence of boundaries between 'high' and 'low' worship. Alcohol and blood sacrifice were part of both upper- and lower-caste culture, and the deities worshipped spanned cosmologies. The murdered Tiyya youth, Palantayi Kannan, was as much a part of the Nayar pantheon as Vishnumurti was of the lower-caste pantheon. Because of this constant process of dissemination it becomes very difficult to speak of social change in terms of imitation, that is 'sanskritization', as Srinivas does. [50] Over a period of time the boundaries between beliefs, practices, and deities became blurred, and in north Malabar there arose a composite culture shared by upper and lower castes. The religious cosmology was defined as much by the lower castes as by the upper castes: the assimilation of local heroes and heroines and Nayar ancestors in a shared pantheon of worship.

The community of worship around the shrines possessed ambivalent characteristics. Some religious practices emphasised 'casteness' and the place of castes within a hierarchy, while others afforded a vision of a sphere in which all castes mingled without difference. Coupled with this was the fact that, in times of dearth, the shrine community was dependent on the stocks of grain held by the shrine and the dominant Nayar household which managed it. An unequivocal rejection of the shrine-centred sphere of worship would be problematic for its constituents. The rest of the paper looks at the attempts of reformers to move away from this shrine community either to set up parallel structures or to integrate the various levels within the religious hierarchy. The masses were to be drummed to the temples which had allowed entry only to the upper castes. The community of worship was sought to be extended by flattening all variation and thus bringing about an equality between castes in the sphere of worship.

The Emergence of Lower-Caste Protest

The primary attributes underlying the shrine festivals were of tension and ambivalence. They held forth the possibility both of the effacing of hierarchy, albeit temporarily, and of the entrenchment of caste roles. It

was this tension which lay at the heart of attempts towards social change in the early decades of the twentieth century. We shall look at the emergence of a new lower-caste elite, which derived its status from government employment, the legal profession and commerce. It tried to underwrite its status in the towns by founding temples and trying to wean existing communities of worship from rural shrines. The efforts drew upon and paralleled similar movements in the countryside, fuelled by diverse motives, among sections within both upper and lower castes. Worship at shrines was to be eschewed in order to break with the entrenchment of caste roles at their festivals, and to move towards an equal community of worship around the new temples.

Underlying this religious idiom were questions of secular influence at the level of the locality, and the attempt to create, within largely urban areas, new orbits of power paralleling those of the households in the countryside. The new temples and shrines were situated in and around the towns ofTellicherry and Cannanore, and were partly the reflection of the attempts at self-definition of a new caste elite. They tried to reclaim those aspects of the rural shrine community which allowed for equality between the constituents, though some of course were to remain more equal than others. This elite made a seemingly paradoxical summons to unity. It called upon people in the name of caste (which for a large number was rooted in the local context of worship and production) in order to do away with it altogether.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the Tiyyas were, in the words of the Malabar District Gazetteer, coming to be regarded as 'one of the most progressive classes in India'. [51] They were among the first to join the network of elementary and high schools which the Basel Evangelical Mission had set up by the end of the nineteenth century. [52] Some had worked their way into the colonial administration as *tehsildars,* lawyers, pleaders, sub-judges and up to the ranks of deputy collectors. [53] In the early nineteenth century, before the pressure of realizing more revenue had led to the formation of the Excise Department, the rights to sell and tap toddy had been auctioned under the auspices of the Revenue Department of the Government of Madras.

Speculators and contractors were given a free hand in administering this ramshackle system, and sections among the Tiyyas, who monopolized the toddy-tapping profession, created informal empires criss-crossing the countryside. Moreover, Tiyya tenants on garden lands had benefited by the amendment to the Malabar Compensation for Tenants' Improvements Act which was passed in 1900. The amendment necessitated the payment of compensation to the tenant before eviction, which, in a period of burgeoning cash crop prices, created a class of de facto tenants on garden lands. [54]

Tiyya tenants prospered with the increasing prices for pepper and coconut from the turn of the century, and began to invest in small tile and weaving factories in the towns. During the First World War, the rise in demand from the armed forces for cloth gave a fillip to the establishment of weaving factories in north Malabar. These were mainly ramshackle enterprises employing between five and ten men. [55] Increasingly, Tellicherry and Cannanore began attracting petty traders, casual labourers, and weavers from the hinterland. In 1909, C. Krishnan founded the Calicut Bank, which catered primarily for other Tiyya professionals and merchants. Unlike the other established banks, money was lent primarily on the security of promissory notes and pledged ornaments. Over the years, its activity was extended to the financing of small tea-shops and stalls set up in the towns. [56]

While opportunities for employment and credit in the towns along the coast increased, this in no sense precipitated a large-scale movement away from the villages. Labourers continued to live as they had done earlier with a foot in two worlds. Towns had always acted as a source of casual work during the agricultural slack season and thus helped to supplement rural incomes. Most individuals continued to cling on to their small homesteads with palm and jack trees. Moreover, even while they were employed on the fields, labourers made coir from the husk of the coconut and bartered it for rice, chillies, and other necessities in the market. Some banks along the coast were willing to lend money on the mortgage of coir yarn. [57] Until 1931, agricultural wages in the interior remained high and even those who migrated to

more lucrative employment in the plantations of Coorg returned home within two years. [58] Similarly, the difference between the average wage of a worker in the factory and a cottage worker was too small to induce the latter to abandon home for the factory. [59]

There were reasons why work in the factories was not necessarily seen as a more attractive proposition. Mills employing 200 to 300 workers were usually owned by locally powerful landowners who treated the villages under their control as a catchment area for labour. [60] Workers in these mills experienced the same degree of physical abuse as they would have in the fields, probably even more, confined as they were within a limited environment. Physical attacks on workers by the management often provided the point of entry for early trade-union organizers. [61] The strict regimen and cramped conditions in factories did not appeal to many. A satirical pamphlet of 1916 compared work in a saw-mill favourably with work in the fields. The author had so much time on his hands in the mill that he could watch the beautiful young women at work ('I do not lie when I say that such women cannot be found anywhere else in the world'), and gamble at cards, winning such amounts that 'the debts at home [were] being paid off.' [62] Lastly, the new tile factories and saw-mills were an uncertain source of employment. They were both at the mercy of the monsoons; heavy rains rendered brick kilns useless, and prevented the drying of bricks. On the other hand a poor monsoon meant that logs could not be floated down river to the saw-mills. Moreover, with the rush of would-be entrepreneurs into such ventures, there was a crisis of overproduction by 1920. This soon because a chronic condition until the Depression and the slump in foreign demand put the majority of these small factories out of business. [63]

Changing circumstances and widening opportunities produced, however, redefinitions of work and its relation to status. In the two decades before the Depression, there was a considerable outflow of emigrants to the tea estates in Ceylon and rubber plantations in Malaya. [64] Many of the lower-caste migrants who returned to Malabar found

themselves at odds with local authority and notions of hierarchy. Their experience of anonymity and, therefore, a degree of equality, in the countries where they had worked underlay their censure of the relation between low casteness and their erstwhile occupations. A pamphlet of 1927 spoke of the 'absence of caste in Singapore, Penang, and even in savage Africa.' [65] Many others saw the prospect of education, or the experience of it, as the panacea for all inequality. As an artisan pamphleteer wrote in 1911, 'The foundations of the world, in all ages and for all persons, regardless of religion or caste, rest on two things—education and wealth.' [66] Meetings of the Araya Mahajana Sabha (Fishermen's Congress) in 1920 asserted that their salvation 'depended on education and education alone'. [67] Conservatives were beginning to fear that, with the younger generation of 'cobblers, carpenters' and others increasingly going in for elementary education, instead of learning their hereditary trade, 'special classes of people would become utterly extinct'. [68]

Just as the increased availability of alternatives generated debates about work and status, the emergence of protest movements contributed to further redefinitions. This was particularly evident in the case of the Tiyyas, who as an emergent elite sought to distance themselves from the association of their caste with the profession of toddy-tapping. At the same time Tiyya tenants and labourers attempted to move out of the relations of deference within the network of households and shrines in the countryside. Some among them sought part-time employment in the towns to assert their independence, at the same time as moving into newer circuits of dependence, particularly those of credit being established by Tiyya elites in the towns. All these diverse trends were wafted along on the winds blowing from the princely state of Travancore to the south.

The Ezhavas, caste compatriots of the Tiyyas, were undergoing a similar economic and social surge forward but they were denied access to both higher education and government employment. [69] Sri Narayana Guru, an Ezhava with a knowledge of Malayalam, Sanskrit, and Tamil, took the Ezhavas to a 'higher' realm of worship through the abandoning

of animal sacrifice and the use of alcohol in worship. He insisted that the community distance itself from its lucrative, but what he defined as demeaning, involvement with the toddy trade. In 1903, the Guru's message was institutionalized in the SNDP Yogam. What was the social message of the SNDP Yogam and the Sri Narayana movement in Travancore? Firstly, it argued against differences in society based on caste. Narayana Guru made a direct connection between the 'low' social and religious practices of the Ezhavas and their low social status. They could attain equality with others by becoming like the upper castes. This idea found expression in the realm of worship in the setting up of Ezhava temples devoted to gods of the Brahmanical pantheon. The entrance to an equal society lay through common worship. Secondly, the SNDP Yogam sought to create self-esteem within the Ezhava community of building their economic strength and propagating a vigorous self-help ethic. The motto of the *Vivekadayam,* the house journal of the Yogam, was 'God helps those who help themselves.' [70]

Resonances of the SNDP's message of equality and economic selfreliance can be found in the activities of the Tiyyas along the coast in north Malabar. However, the trajectory they took was slightly different. In July 1906, Kottieth Ramunni, a lawyer at the Tellicherry courts and K. Chantan, a retired deputy collector, founded the Sri Gnanodaya Yogam (the Society for the Awakening of Knowledge). Two years later, the Yogam proposed the building of a temple for the Tiyyas of north Malabar to which they alone would have access. In 1908, Narayana Guru himself laid the foundation of the Jagannatha temple at Tellicherry. By 1916, two more temples had been built; the Srikanteswara at Calicut and the Sundareswara at Cannanore. From the very beginning the new temples represented a departure from the idea of community envisaged by the rural shrines. All of them were financed wholly by donations from prosperous Tiyyas, and the names of the prominent donors were inscribed on tablets put up on the walls. [71] What these temples needed was to gain general acceptance and adherents who could sustain the temple with something more tangible than worship. There were two immediate constraints to contend with. First, the new community could only be a limited one both because

Nayars would not worship at what were seen as Tiyya establishments, and Cherumas and Pulayas were prevented from doing so by the managers of the temple. Secondly, in both the countryside and the hinterland of the towns, Nayars, Tiyyas, and Pulayas were involved in a more universal, vital, and vibrant culture around shrines. The attempts to build temples by the Tiyya elites have been usually subsumed in the corpulent, all-embracing category of 'sanskritization'. Their main aim, according to the most recent interpretation, was to 'to obtain access to the high gods for lower castes'. [72] However, it is not emulation which we are dealing with here, an idea which presumes a filtering downward of the ideas and practices of a social elite—the primary element of change in an otherwise static system. In the dynamic context of shrine worship and the cosmology of the *teyyattam,* categories of worship were miscible. Different castes had always had 'access' to all gods, ancestors, and spirits. When Siva or Vishnu, in their forms as Sundareswara and Jagannatha, were installed at Tiyya temples, it was less a move *up* a religious hierarchy as a move *sideways*. Local deities had always possessed this manifold aspect—the local hero Palantayi Kannan was also Vishnumurti and vice versa.

Shrines, dominant households and their adherents constituted the network of influence in the countryside. The Tiyya elite tried to create a parallel urban network around the Jagannatha temple at Tellicherry and the Sundareswara temple at Cannanore. What we have here is the desire of both caste elites and subordinates to distance themselves from the shared culture of the shrines, and set up an alternative religious culture nominally premised on community and equality. The temples attempted to unite Tiyyas at the level of the region, prayer societies at the level of the locality. Both these alternatives attempted to move away from that aspect of the earlier shrine community which emphasised caste roles. [73] Indeed, caste reformers redefined rural religious festivals so as to emphasize only those aspects which were seen to entrench caste identity. They were contending on two fronts in the towns. Not only did they have to draw away Tiyyas from existing orbits around shrines in the towns and in the rural hinterland, they also had to compete for space with a flourishing Mappila community. The attempt to create a

community around the temples was premised as much on conflicts over urban space between the Tiyya elites and commercial groups like the Mappilas investing in overleases in the towns had begun to acquire land near existing temples and shrines. [74] They established *srambis* (wayside shrines) and enlarged existing *srambis* into mosques where prayers were held on Fridays.

The triad of temples at Cannanore, Tellicherry, and Calicut was established by 1916, and two years later a Tiyya conference was held in Calicut. It called upon all Tiyyas to break away from worshipping at rural temples and shrines to which they supplied offerings but which denied them entrance. A resolution stated that there was an overwhelming 'need to eschew all ideas of the lowness of Tiyyas and the superiority of the upper castes'. [75] Sundareswara and Jagannatha temples were of, for, and by the Tiyyas, and it was here that the selfesteem of the community would be built. If the Jagannatha temple had to vie with other Tiyya shrines for worshippers then it needed to pull itself out of purely local circuits and aspire to become a centre of pilgrimage, like Kottiyur. By projecting itself as a rival pilgrimage centre, the Jagannatha temple could try to draw upon wider loyalties as well as strengthen the sense ofTiyya community. The Gnanodaya Yogam exhorted Tiyyas to make a pilgrimage to the Jagannatha temple rather than the one at Kottiyur. They represented it as the eschewing of toddy and blood sacrifices in rituals for a purer form of worship. In one sense it was an espousal of the teaching of Sri Narayana Guru. On the other hand, the adoption of rituals using clarified butter, milk and sugar (rather than palm jaggery), presumed the economic wellbeing of the worshippers. [76] A pamphlet contrasted the 'pure way' in which rites were performed at Jagannatha temple as a result of the influence of Narayana Guru: 'Without any mercy we killed cocks for worshipping God/ With the smell of blood, our temples had become like markets.' [77]

Purists with sensitive nostrils, those who wished to display their wealth in their form of worship, and those who desired to make Jagannatha a Tiyya bastion: each of these for their different reasons began moving to Tellicherry. There was a steadily increasing trickle from the

countryside for other reasons. The Kottiyur temple was managed by Nayar households, and large numbers of Tiyyas resented what they saw as their subordinate position as suppliers of toddy and poultry to festivals. They began moving out of local spheres of obligation as well. In 1921, Tiyya tappers refused to take the traditional pots of toddy decorated with flowers and red silk to the festival in Chirakkal temple. Without mincing words, they described the festival 'as an occasion for the upper castes to get free liquor'. [78] However, this movement away from caste obligations was not uniform. In Puthur and Kalavallur *desams,* there were two groups among the Tiyyas, and the 'conservatives' were supported by and continued to work with the Nayar landlords. [79]

In the course of two decades, a shared religious culture had undergone redefinition with those aspects which replicated caste inequality being stressed. At the same time the Tiyya elites projected the whole 'castes' of Tiyyas as a community apart and outside the pale of the Hindu religion. [80] It was an abstraction both from local identities and from broader definitions of inequality—of being lower castes within the Hindu fold. As we shall see, nationalist reformers would build upon the theme of caste inequality as being something entrenched in religion. The recasting of the relation between a *tharavadu* and its dependants was a significant corollary of the redefinition of popular religion. Subtle networks of obligation, reciprocity, and custom were now perceived and translated, in terms of the forced extraction of labour and the entrenchment of abject dependence. The Depression was to lend an edge to these indigenous redefinitions of 'labour'. 'Traditional' relations were to be undermined by the economic crisis which rendered *tharavadu* reluctant to fulfil obligations. [81]

Meanwhile, new arrangements further whittled away the old consensus, and promoted disaffection between Nayars and Tiyyas in the countryside. From the late nineteenth century, the Madras government had begun to tax the native liquor industry in an effort to raise more revenue. The informal, ramshackle, and cut-throat administration

provided by the speculators and contractors was slowly replaced by an excise bureaucracy. [82] From the very beginning, there was resistance, and Malabar consistently recorded the highest number of offenders against excise laws in the Madras Presidency. [83] The severe taxation policy of the government affected relations in the countryside to a considerable extent. Landlords and village officials were made responsible for rooting out excise crime, which vested further powers of coercion in their hands. This was translated into a conflict between Nayar officials and Tiyya tappers, and was absorbed into existing local conflicts and assertions of power. Toddy-tappers were driven to the brink of temperance by excessive extractions—by the landlord, toddy-shop owner, contractors, and seemingly every excise official who encountered them on the roads. [84]

The enforcement of *abkari* regulations distanced officials from the tappers, and the taxation policy closed down shops and areas where Nayars, Tiyyas, and Cherumas had shared their drunkenness. Tiyyas who quit the network of shrines were at the receiving end of the daily oppression of Nayar and other excise officials, and increasingly unwilling to carry on an expensive occupation. In September 1918, Kottieth Krishnan, K. Chantan and a few others associated with the new Tiyya temples, founded the Kerala Labour Union for toddy-tappers who had decided to give up their profession and take up the production of jaggery. In this instance, the economic hardship of the tappers, the possibility of shifting within the profession of tapping to producing something free of governmental exaction or social opprobrium, and the desire of the Tiyya leaders to win adherents to their temples, all came together.

Nationalism, Cleanliness, and Caste Status

The eschewing of both alcohol and blood-sacrifice in rituals, temperance, and the association of these with caste status, began to mesh with larger concerns. Nayar social reformers and nationalists joined the fray and transformed these issues by imbuing them with a 'civilizing' mission. The exercise of restraint in one's emotions as well as

one's actions—the rejection of drunkenness and the violence implicit in blood sacrifices—came to be seen as the mark of civilisation. Just as the taxation policy of the excise department had removed one sphere of interaction between sections of the Nayars and lower castes, involvement with the Congress distanced another section among the Nayars from a space of common worship soaked, in their eyes, with toddy and blood. Worship at shrines was slowly being eschewed in favour of the purer worship at temples. Moreover, markers of inequality would be effaced by the adoption of cleanliness as the motif that would level all difference. With the entry of the Congress, the movement away from the shrines was knitted with the idea of equality in the theme of temple entry—clean Hindus would enter the portals of the temples as equals. Here again, the idea of a religious community of equals was maintained; it was an expansion of the original idea put forward by the Tiyyas and, again, a wider secular unity was not conceived of. Civilisation, cleanliness, and equality were the watchwords of the age.

The Indian National Congress had included temperance in its political programme as early as the Allahabad session in 1888. Bipin Chandra Pal developed the attack on alcohol as a polemic against the British government which realized revenue by keeping the Indian popu-lation in a state of inebriation. [85] Gandhi's visit to Malabar with Shau- kat Ali in the cause of non-co-operation and Khilafat had sparked off considerable enthusiasm for the ideas of non-violence, temperance, and a simple life. [86] For many Nayars, involvement with the Congress meant the adoption of a purer style of life which was quite at variance with their lifestyles as country gentry. A pamphlet written in 1920 depicted the transformation wrought on a typical martial, hard-drinking, hot-tempered Nayar by the introduction of a *charkha* into his home. He gave up his favourite pastime of hunting, threw his gun into the household pond, and devoted himself to spinning meditatively. [87]

In 1921, Congress activities briefly fanned out from the activities of isolated individuals when agitation for security of tenure for tenants and Khilafat activity meshed together. The outbreak of the Mappila rebellion, the attempt to set up an Islamic state in the taluka of Ernad

and Walluvanad, and rumours of forced conversion of Hindus badly frightened the Nayar Congressmen. For the next decade, there was a retreat from secular political activity and an increasingly introspective Hindu style began to develop in Malabar. Unlike northern India, in Malabar there was more of an attempt to create a Hindu identity rather than the assertion of an existing one. [88] As we have seen, the caste movement of the Tiyyas saw itself as moving away from the realm of Hinduism with the endeavour to create a network of temples where a community of worshippers would be unified by their caste identity.

The Congress had always recognized the problem of untouchability out of the corner of its eye, but it was only in 1920 that untouchability came to be defined in a particular sense as a 'reproach to Hinduism'. [89] Religious leaders were requested to help in reforming Hinduism so that it could be purged of this egregious accretion. A nationalist unity could be imagined only if the difference and inequality between castes could be tackled. If Hinduism could be purified by the abolition of untouchability and everyone could enter it as equals, then it would be possible to unify the diverse caste movements under the umbrella of the Congress. Ostensibly there was a constituency here, since the caste movements had excluded untouchables and lower castes from their programme. In a pamphlet called *Svatantrayuddham* (Freedom Struggle), a Nayar Congressman rebuked the Tiyyas for not behaving as equals with Pulayas, Panans, and Nayadis and not allowing them into Jagannatha or Sundareswara. [90]

T.K. Madhavan, a close associate of Narayana Guru, carried this objective to the national realm when he introduced a resolution at the Kakinada session of the Congress in 1923 stating that temple entry was the birthright of all Hindus. If all castes were allowed to enter temples which restricted entry to upper castes, then Hinduism could be purged of inequality. Caste equality lay in the sanctuary of a temple. After the disaster of the Khilafat alliance, the Nayar leaders of the Congress needed a programme which could at the same time involve large numbers of people and subsume caste movements into a more general Hindu identity. In 1924, Kelappan Nayar convened an anti-

untouchability committee within the K.P.C.C. and toured Travancore with a party of Congressmen from Malabar. It was decided that the Congress would fight for the right of Ezhavas and lower castes to use the roads around Vaikkam temple. On 30 March 1924, K.P Kesava Memon and T.K. Madhavan, accompanied by Nayar, Pulaya, and Ezhava volunteers, attempted to walk on the roads near the temple, and were arrested. The next day three more Congress leaders from Malabar were arrested; they included K. Kelappan (who by now had eschewed his caste surname). In the meanwhile, Gandhi had been following events with great interest, and had sent goodwill telegrams to the organizers. With the arrest of all the Nayar Congress leaders, George Joseph (1887—1938), a Syrian Christian, and one-time editor of *Young India*, assumed charge of the satyagraha. Gandhi immediately wrote to Joseph, specifying that the Vaikkam satyagraha was a Hindu affair and he 'should let the Hindus do the work'. [91]

Gandhi stressed that the satyagraha was not only a Hindu but also a local issue which was not part of the non-co-operation movement. The Vaikkam satyagraha was a 'socio-religious movement. It had no immediate or ulterior political motive behind it. It was directed purely against an age-long, intolerable sacerdotal prejudice.' [92] Gandhi's intervention meant that the Vaikkam satyagraha petered out into an issue which was finally decided in the Legislative Council. A resolution to allow Ezhavas to use roads near the temples was defeated by one vote. [93] What were the consequences of the Vaikkam satyagraha for Malabar? It bolstered the spirits of a demoralized Congress which was able to recoup itself after the shock of the Mappila rebellion of 1921. Equally, it gently moved them towards the *cul de sac* of 'Hindu' politics and of seeing the problem of caste and untouchability as a purely religious issue; temple entry and caste equality meshed into a unit. Nevertheless, it was a programme with which the Congress in Malabar could attempt to bring the other castes into one consolidated movement. A pamphlet by a Nayar Congressman described the Vaikkam satyagraha as the achievement of 'Ezhava volunteers with the civilised classes as their leaders.' [94]

Gandhi's definition of the issue of untouchability as one in which the Hindus had to purify themselves, provided Nayar Congressmen in the interior with their own programme. They turned to those castes dependent on their households as labourers or as ritual functionaries. A.C. Kannan Nayar (1898—1967), a Congressman and landlord, enthusiastically recorded in his diary how he had organized the wood-workers and washermen dependent on his household and tried to inculcate habits of cleanliness and temperance in them. [95] A younger generation within the Nayar households, which was drawn to the Congress, organized their literally captive audience of Cheruma and Pulaya labourers into temperance leagues. Tiyyas continued to assert their new-found sense of community and status not only in the exclusion of Pulayas and Cherumas from their temples, but also in an increasing tendency to impose sanctions on castes lower to them. These castes were caught between the pincers of Tiyya disapproval and Nayar enthusiasm for organizing them.

Gandhi and the Congress defined the problem of caste inequality in terms of an opposition between cleanliness and the lack of it, locating the whole issue not in terms of economic or social realities but a physical state. Though uncleanliness as associated with the *bhangis* profession had ritual connotations as well, since they removed human excrement, in Congress activity cleanliness became a secular metaphor for casteness. *Khadi,* conceived initially as a symbol of Indian self-reliance, now came to assume a pivotal role in this context as the great leveller. Caste difference had been stressed earlier in the way people dressed. The advocacy of *khadi* implied that if everyone dressed alike then difference could be eliminated. The wearing of clean, white, starched *khadi* emphasised cleanliness as well as the aspiration to sameness. Once cleanliness had been introduced into the public arena as a concept, it assumed the same force as an idea that socialism was to have in the next decade. At a meeting of the Adi Keraliyar in Kalliasseri, a resolution asserted that 'cleanliness is the only thing that distinguishes the upper castes from the Harijans.' [96] Once the ostensible principle underlying difference was clarified, caste inequality was hoist with its own petard.

Given that the lower castes had been rendered clean—abstemious, bathed, and given to daily prayer—how were they to be admitted to society as equals? Many of the early Nayar Congressmen organised interdining with the castes dependent on their households. [97] However, these were localized activities and could not be reproduced on a larger scale because of the involvement of individuals in several circuits of power—that of their caste, their landlord, and their locality. One way of uniting these isolated activities could have been to utilize religious fairs and festivals, and attempt to gain entry for lower castes to temples and shrines. [98]

Shrine festivals drew upon a limited community of worshippers within a well-defined geographical area. Moreover, the Nayar Congressmen were keen to dissociate themselves from the consumption of alcohol and blood sacrifices which accompanied worship at most shrines. In this they were at one with the Tiyya elites who advocated a withdrawal from the shrines as well as those Tiyyas who were escaping from the entrenchment of their caste inferiority at shrine festivals. The rhetoric of cleanliness had to be synthesized with the larger issue of caste equality. Tiyya elites had partly solved the problem by standing as a separate, and therefore equal community with their own temples. The Nayar Congressmen, working with the notion of difference inherent in caste and the idea of unity implicit in their nationalist message, were seemingly at an impasse. But all these strands—the movement away from shrines, the move towards cleanliness and its association with casteness, the possibility raised by the Vaikkam satyagraha of temple entry for all castes, and above all the narrowing of Congress horizons into a Hindu introspection—were rearranging themselves into a pattern. The pattern was of a throng of clean, equal Hindus marching through the portrals of a temple towards a nationalist unity. This was the new ideal, and the temple at Guruvayur was the Bastille to be stormed. As Kelappan was to write to Nehru towards the end of 1931, 'Guruvayur temple is the last refuge of all caste arrogance and prejudice. Once untouchability is dislodged from there it will have no quarter outside.' [99]

Conclusion

An emergent elite among the Tiyyas precipitated a movement away from the shared culture centred on shrines—a negotiated community of both sustenance and worship. This involved a redefinition both of existing relations between households and labourers as well as of the meaning and content of religious festivals. Both upper-caste reformers and the broad political ideology of nationalism built upon this discourse. Both envisaged a move to a 'higher' realm of shared religious culture characterized by normative values of purity and restraint. The abandoning of one domain of shared culture (now marred by its seeming reproduction of inequality) was coeval with the aspiration towards another sphere of common culture inhabited by equals. This was a process that did not reach fruition as the *tharavadu*- shrine-labourer complex underwent redefinition, and rejuvenation, in the aftermath of the Depression. In a period of economic dislocation, food shortages, and expansion of cultivation to the poorer margins, the community of subsistence was reiterated, but with the vital difference that the *tharavadu* were calling the shots. To an extent socialist and peasant-union activity managed to mitigate some of the harshness of relations between empowered landlords and dependent labourers. They also tried to create a secular idiom of politics to tackle the question of social disparities, but this intimation of equality too remained elusive.

17

Holy Infancy

Love and Power in a 'Low-Caste' Sect in Bengal [1]

TANIKA SARKAR

Chaitanya bhakti, the predominant strand of Vaisnav devotionalism in eastern India, has stimulated a very diverse range of sects since the sixteenth century when the great saint Chaitanya preached his message of love for Krishna. Many of these sects appear to be mutually contradictory: a gulf seemingly separates the mainstream orders founded by Chaitanya's immediate disciples from the deviant, esoteric folk cults that claimed a loose affiliation to Gaudiya theories devoted to Chaitanya. [1]

Here I look at a curious and obscure little local sect in the Jessore-Khulna region in eastern Bengal, [2] a sect that does not quite fit within either side of the binary divide. [3] It was formed in the late eighteenth century by Balakdas, a 'low-caste' shudra savant from a peasant family. Most unusually, he was apprenticed to a brahman guru, Nakul Brahmachari, in his childhood. Village brahmans, impressed with certain early signs of extraordinary power, sponsored his religious training under Nakul. Still more unusually, the guru initiated him and taught him Sanskrit and Bengali religious texts, even though, strictly speaking, the

shudra was not entitled to Sanskrit, the language of the gods. Nakul, therefore, combined the vital roles of *shikshaguru* who teaches, and *dikshaguru* who initiates. More important for Balak's future, Nakul left him a precious idol of the child Krishna or Balgopal, miraculously discovered and coming alive for his two devotees. [4] It is interesting that the sixteenth-century lawgiver Raghunandan, a near contemporary of Chaitanya, had recommended the worship of the infant Gopal as especially appropriate for shudras. [5]

The design of Balakadas' hagiography alerts us to several dimen-sions in Bengali devotionalism that have escaped the attention of social historians of early modern Hinduism. [6] If we look at the founding myths of local sects, or at tales about domestic shrines, we immediately become aware of the immense significance of the idol around whom devotion is organized. [7] Almost invariably, in each case, there is the romance of a sudden and unexpected discovery by the first worshipper, an astonishing revelation of miraculous signs. It is a drama of a deliberate and playful self-disclosure by the deity to the elect, both a fragment of the god and a mark of his special grace to the recipient. In the twentieth-century hagiography about Balakdas there are two separate narratives about the discovery of the idol: one collected from popular lore, the other a more 'rational' non-miraculous one where Balakdas picked the idol from the streets of a pilgrimage town. The latter version was favoured by the educated, upper-caste, middle-class hagiographer, but we will later focus on the 'non-rational' miracle tale favoured by Balak's low-caste worshippers and contemporaries.

Let me cite another example from a different sect: a founding tale that is fairly typical of the discovery myths. The *lingam* of Shiva that is worshipped by millions at the pilgrimage temple of Tarakeshwar in south-west Bengal was supposedly discovered by young cowherds playing in the forest who were struck by the fact that a cow disappeared for some time every day; trailing it, they came upon a half sunk *lingam* over which the cow was pouring forth a profuse and spontaneous stream of milk. [8]

Once discovered, the idol is invested with a special name and an individuated biography, often revealed by the deity in a dream. The human form and gesture in which the idol form is displayed compels a particular religious emotion and style of worship: in the case of Vaisnavs, erotic contemplation if the deity is in the company of his beloved, or paternal affection if he is shown as a child. The innumerable particularities and unique history that each individual idol or *vigraha* possesses—whether housed in domestic shrines or in temples—is crucial for mobilizing a specific devotional response, mood, and aesthetic stance, especially important to Vaisnav bhakti. Visual representations of the child Krishna sometimes show him as a tiny, wayward, dancing figure, whose smallness and abandon invite delighted affection. That is how, for instance, he is depicted in some miniatures that illustrate the *Puranas*: he is the smallest figure in the pictures, far smaller than the demons that he is shown to be killing, even as he dances. [9]

Balakdas chose to worship the infant Krishna. He developed a relationship of paternal love towards the holy child, a very pervasive reli-gious sentiment, common to many Vaisnav as well as non-Vaisnav religious imaginations in Bengal. Apart from verses recalling Krishna's childhood miracles and play, Chaitanya's own childhood has occupied a large and significant place in his hagiographies. [10] The saint's early life had an autonomous value as well as a lexical importance: it proved his own early greatness and was a reminder of the celestial powers of the child Krishna. [11]Some of his hagiographers' childhood tales were also written down and commemorated. [12]

Other sects, too, have sometimes adored their deities as a child. Shiva had eminently childlike qualities in his mythological represent-ations. Shakta devotees—dedicated to the Great Goddess, Shiva's consort—celebrate her divine childhood in memorable songs. A special genre of devotional songs, *agamani,* written by Ramprasad, Bharat- chandra, and Kamalakanta among many others, became extremely popular from the eighteenth century. [13] They are composed as the words of her mother, acutely missing her married daughter, and anti-cipating her

three-day annual visits to the natal home with joy and dread: the visits being such a comfort and yet so very brief. [14] The genre entered the domain of folk performances from the nineteenth century as Ram Basu and Dasarathi Ray, popular *kabiwalas,* or poets who composed impromptu verses in mutual competition in public performances, often sang about the much missed divine child. [15] Unlike the emotions aroused by the child Krishna, devotion towards this feminine divinity is steeped in sorrow and the certainty of loss. The joy of the brief reunion of mother and daughter is frenetic, made anxious by the relentless passage of time.

At the same time, major or monumental works of Bengali religious iconography—paintings, sculpture, or large clay idols worshipped annually and then immersed in a river—did not represent the parent—child relationship in significant ways. [16] Instead, miniature idols, more as everyday and household religious objects, embodied the child god. These would be most often preserved at domestic shrines at home rather than worshipped as centrepieces in temples. Uma, the Great Goddess as a young girl, has no icon, nor is she worshipped as an autonomous being, a stand-alone deity. She is remembered only in songs and verses as a transient part of the life of the Great Goddess. [17] Balakdas' Gopal was unusually fortunate to have an entire temple dedicated to him but the temple itself was a minor, local landmark. It seems, then, that the holy child was commemorated in small icons, worshipped in intimate but non-public spaces.

In literary creations, too, *balyaleela,* or the divine sport of the holy infant, was never a theme that occupied an entire text, the way Krishna's erotic play often would. It would always be an important prelude, a part of a text. The child was, therefore, an object of devotion but not the most prominent aspect of canonical iconography or sacred literature. Gaudiya Vaisnavism admitted *vatsalya* or parental love as a legitimate *rasa,* an emotion with which to approach the god, but it did not privilege it particularly. The simultaneous importance and marginality of the figure of the child in the Bengali religious imagination is a striking ambivalence. [18]Although Bengali Vaisnavism has generated a

particularly rich crop of scholarship around its many aspects, the discursive significance of this ambivalence has been rather neglected.

Balakdas was a low-caste savant, though one much respected by brahmans. So were most members of his sect. Low-caste devotion is usually studied on one of three distinct registers: as willing submission to and imitation of upper-caste forms, though from a humble distance, something which Michael Moffat has described. [19] Or as dissidence and rebellion against upper-caste forms, which Sekhar Bandyopadhyay studied for the Matua sect in late-nineteenth-century Bengal. [20] Or, as Bernard S. Cohn showed in his study of the Shivanarayani sect in UP, such devotion can exist within a new sect, founded and led by upper castes, which cleared a space, albeit on unequal terms, for low-caste Chamars and Dusadhs. [21] Balakdashis constituted a category separable from all these. Balakdas did not rebel, nor did he merely copy. He founded his own sect and was its indisputable leader, improvising a distinctive style all his own. Yet there was no rebellion in him, only conformism towards caste. I take up this case as a departure, an unexplored form of subaltern devotionalism within the given caste order. We need to reflect on the precise ways in which paternalism shaped and drove this form.

We must be careful, however, not to bifurcate the question of caste in Vaisnav bhakti into a simple high- and low-caste division. For Balakdas' caste identity, the category of shudra would mean little. The identity was at once more concrete and more mobile, inflected and reformulated by class. He and his followers were men from aspiring and solvent peasant-artisan-small-trader communities, many of whom would later claim an improved ritual status. We need to read his religion and the place of childhood within it while keeping these distinctions in mind.

II

When he struck out on his own path, Balakdas offered a simplified version of Gaudiya Vaisnavism's *achintyabhedabhed tattwa* or the theory of incomprehensible dualism/non-dualism: the concept that the human and the divine soul are, at once, one and different: just as Radha,

as Krishna's power of bliss and joy, is both an internal aspect of the god and is, yet, a different being, so as to enable a relationship of mutual pleasure. Many Bengali Vaisnavs claim that the theory constitutes a separate fifth order, apart from the four main schools of Vaisnav bhakti. Many others suggest, however, that it is a subset of the school of *vishishtadvaitavad* or distinctive non-separation. [22]

Gaudiya Vaisnavs place the divine duo Radha and Krishna in a state of holy adultery or parakiya. [23]At the Jaipur court in 1718, and again at the Muslim nawab's court at Murshidabad in 1720, they suc-cessfully debated on behalf of *parakiyatattwa* with their opponents who subscribed to the *swakiya* theory of licit relationships and who preferred to commemorate the conjugal alliances of Krishna. [24]

Instead of the six-stage ladder of Gaudiya bhakti, Balak taught a three-tier gradation, [25] wherein the devotee proceeds from worship (the state of *bahyadasha* or alterity in relation to the deity) to direct observation of divine sport *(ardha bahyadasha* or half merger with the divine being) to full merger with divinity *(antardasha* or complete internalization). He modestly claimed that he himself inhabited merely the second stage. He acknowledged that even though Gaudiya Vaisnavism rightly privileged the erotic *leela* or divine sport of Krishna as the highest *madhura rasa,* denoting sweetness and loveliness, he himself preferred the path of *dasya* or servitude. [26] In practice, however, he followed *vatsalya,* approaching the god with parental love: an emotional stance that Gaudiya Vaisnavism recognizes but only as a lesser preference among the several approaches to the divine.

In keeping a certain respectful distance from the highest tenets of Vaisnav bhakti, Balakdas behaved like a good and faithful shudra. At the same time, quite obviously practising *vatsalya,* he was believed to possess a direct and lived relationship with the god: one where he did not merely serve the god, as he would in the case of *dasya,* but where he also protected and nurtured him as his guardian, his father. Local brahmans endorsed that claim. It seems interesting that he designated himself as an adherent of the path of servitude when he so clearly

approached Gopal with parental love, a competence that was, in fact, granted to him, as shudra, even by Raghunandan, the most orthodox of Bengal lawgivers. The gap between official self-designation and actual practice actually indicates a very spectacular humility prescribed by the Vaisnav code of conduct for all devotees, as well as by the felt and prescribed lowliness of shudradom. The humility undoubtedly reconciled local brahmans to his role as the father figure to the idol. I think that this complex resource of entwined modesty and self-privileging approximates certain elements within Chaitanya bhakti and its multi-caste congregation.

His first followers were low-caste traders who passed along the mighty rivers Bhairab and Madhumati that connected east Bengal marts with distant trade centres in Bengal, and who prayed to his Gopal for safe passage and for protection from the many diseases, floods, hurricanes, river dacoits, and wild animals that regularly ravaged the area. [27] Balak himself came from a peasant shudra family, then called Chasha Kaivartas, later petitioning to be renamed Mahishyas in the 1901 colonial census. [28] A great deal of land reclamation had gone on in the region from the fifteenth century, first under the auspices of agriculturist Sufi pirs, then by Mughals, and, finally under early colonial initiatives. [29] This was followed by a growing market for local crops as Calcutta began to throw out its tentacles into distant places of production and as European trade expanded from the seventeenth century, stimulating local agriculture and manufacture. Local peasants and traders thus, by the eighteenth century, had come to acquire a measure of economic solvency. [30] Chasha Kaivartas had recently severed their links with the degraded ancestral caste of fishermen or Jalia Kaivartas, whose water and ritual occasions were avoided by clean brahmans. They were now called *satchasha* or clean agriculturists. From the late nineteenth century, they would claim the status of even cleaner or intermediate shudras whose water and gifts were acceptable to good brahmans who would, moreover, preside over their ritual ceremonies without fear of disrepute. [31] I have argued elsewhere that such bids for upward mobility found support among the less pure or *patit* brahmans

who did offer their ritual services to lower shudras; they now tried to improve their own ritual ranking within the brahman category by claiming that their shudra clients should be counted among the cleaner ranks. This kind of a symbiotic tie between brahman and shudra patrons and clients has not been adequately comprehended as yet. [32]

It has long been established that Bengali castes underwent a crucial modification from late medieval and early modern times. In a Bengal ruled then for centuries by various Muslim rulers and witnessing large-scale migrations of low castes into Islam, Raghunandan—the great authority of the *dayabhaga* school of Hindu law—prescribed in the sixteenth century that, apart from brahmans, there were no other high castes left in Bengal. All others were shudras whom he minutely classified into thirty-six subdivisions, hierarchically arranged and placed according to the kinds of offerings each was entitled to donate to brahmans. [33] I would suggest that this inaugurated a long era, continuing into late colonial times, of immense competition, reclassification, and reordering of local hierarchies among various shudra *jatis,* their endless self-splittings and fraction-formings. Brahmans remained interested referees in these complicated manoeuvres and the status ranking of some of their own lesser categories would depend on the reclassified rank of their shudra patrons. If some very low castes could be promoted to a somewhat cleaner rank, then many more categories of brahmans could become their priests without losing ritual status. It was the internecine configurations among shudras that emerged as the constitutive site for caste formation, not a brahman-non-brahman or high- and low-caste binary divide. Even those *jatis* which would later claim the *bhadralok* mantle of social respectability alongside brahmans—*kayasthas* and *baidyas*—were classified as shudras by many orthodox brahmans well into the twentieth century. [34]

So, upward mobility had already begun, but the process was still at an early stage. *Satchasha* or the shudra peasant category from which Balakdas came was still a part of the larger Kaivarta appellation and good brahmans avoided them. In Balak's sect—blessed and respected by

brahman—peasant shudras found a measure of self-respect and self-esteem, a repertoire of 'clean', respectable habits and beliefs that aided their aspirations. The fact that Balak was respected by local brahmans and that he possessed a living god would further consolidate their aspirations for status.

Balak's followers were petty traders who had done well out of the newly expanding trade networks. They belonged to both clean and unclean shudra castes, men with a small stock of capital and with growing aspirations towards social respectability and improved ritual ranking. At the same time, their solvency was fragile: a single occasion of natural calamity or river piracy, all too frequent in the eighteenth-century Jessore-Khulna region, could wipe out their savings. They were still despised by the well-entrenched brahmanical orthodoxy in the region. They, too, experienced a mix of vulnerability and ambition. In Balak's sect, they found a man of their own rank who was, nonetheless, respected and trusted by brahmans and who prescribed doctrines and practices like bhakti and vegetarianism that approximated a recognizably superior religious form. The sect was a bridge between low castes becoming respectable, and Gaudiya Vaisnav sectarianism characterized by brahmanical leadership. The personal connections between Balakdas and brahmans enabled this process.

The history of Balak's sect introduces us to the process of upward mobility through a sort of a symbiotic relationship between the brahman and the shudra. It also clarifies a process of community-making among Gaudiya Vaisnavs where caste was rearticulated, through ardent bhakti, on a new register into what Victor Turner calls communitas, moments of intimate bonding across social distances through shared congregational ecstatic worship, and a shared local tradition of miracle tales and wondrous idols. Balak's sect was definitely an autonomous entity. But, even as such, it was firmly encased within the Gaudiya Vaisnav framework of beliefs.

The sect had to find its feet among and against many well-established rivals. Khulna-Jessore was a region dominated upto the late eighteenth century by Muslim landed power and Sufi cultural centres. It was, at the

same time, also a site of brahmanical orthodoxy, rivals to Gaudiya Vaisnavs, as well as numerous folk cults and esoteric popular practices. To some extent, Balakdashi myths had to shape themselves around the folk traditions: they had to promise protection to afflicted and helpless people. Whereas Gaudiya Vaisnavism usually promises bliss and salvation to *bhakts* rather than material rewards, Gopal promised safe passage to mercantile boats and cures from epidemics and fevers.

The new forms of congregational intimacy that the sect developed in competition with others both recall and reorient Chaitanya's endeavours in fifteenth-sixteenth-century Nabadwip. Chaitanya had to contend against successful Islamic proselytization, as also against the orthodox Navyanyaya and neo-Smarta schools entrenched at Nabadwip, brahmanical orthodoxy being often in alliance with the Muslim qazi against Chaitanya. He kept his distance from tantric ritual as well, and from the widespread popular worship of folk deities. [35]

In Chaitanya's time, there were, I think, three available modes of redefining the religious community in the face of the challenge of Islamic proselytization, especially successful among the low castes and the poor. One was the path of severe upper-caste ritualism, an extreme form of re-stratification of upper castes on the basis of purity taboos, and the reinforcement of brahmanical disciplinary norms: all this Chaitanya's contemporary, the neo-Smarta Raghunandan, represented. The other was the more integrative tradition of the Mangal Kavyas or Bengali sacred verse narratives, written by brahman poets, that inserted low-caste deities into an upper-caste pantheon. Chaitanya bhakti cleared a third space, reinstalling a deity from brahmanical Sanskrit texts into popular and folk worship but opening the sect up, on equal and shared terms, to all castes. And, dangerously, this inverted social spaces by saying that the arrogant brahman scholar is spurned by Krishna, who provides salvation to the unlearned shudra and the untouchable: hearts overflowing with love and humility are more hospitable to Krishna's presence than the arid and stony hearts of pandits.

The egaliatarianism worked with interesting openings and closures. Chaitanya converted freely from among the lowly, but, at the same time, he did not try to synthesize cross-caste belief patterns and took nothing from folk cultic traditions. He himself flouted purity- pollution taboos and famously embraced the untouchable Chandal. At the same time, Gaudiya Vaisnavs allowed only non-householder ascetics to initiate the shudra, thus avoiding too close a social intimacy among high- and low-caste households. Chaitanya himself preferred boundless adoration to the path of sacred knowledge. But he asked his brahman disciples to compose a devotional canon in Sanskrit, to develop a ritual calendar, and to formulate sectarian rules, thus combining both charisma and its routinization in his own person. [36]

Chaitanya bhakti had initially encouraged some anarchic social impulses. [37] This was especially true of Chaitanya's early disciple Nityananda, to whose order Balak's guru Nakul belonged. [38] But over the years there was a return to established social hierarchies, even if it was tempered frequently by liminal moments of congregational feasts, musical processions and collective chanting—communitas interrupting and also rejuvenating social difference. [39]

The entangled stories of caste, sect, and community-makings made for important and contradictory social movements. The complexities could be mediated very significantly by tropes of holy infancy. It was Gaudiya Vaisnavism which incorporated *vatsalya* or paternal love as a separate aesthetic order of *rasa* in Vaisnav bhakti. It was not, however, a particularly well-regarded form among them. Through a focus on the Balakdashi sect, I argue that the trope of holy childhood was especially appropriate for a subaltern, conformist sect that struggled to compose its distinctive devotional imagination. The childhood of the god was visualized as a place that was scored over by a sense of divine vulnerability as well as with images of divine power and glory, registering both subalternity and hopes for a transcendence among devotees and admirers who included learned brahmans as well as peasants marked by a plebeian quietist piety.

III

Let us turn briefly to the different orders of childhood which are relevant for us: the divine and the saintly, the latter differentiated between upper- and low-caste saints. Bengali medieval devotional lyrics celebrate the child Krishna as both 'every child' and a fully divine figure, since Krishna is an incarnation of Vishnu, the preserver of Creation. There are elements of power as well as vulnerability in his earthly biography. Both aspects needed to be combined as well as split to make *vatsalya* devotionalism work.

Krishna's life began in prison, and though of royal lineage he was fostered by lowly cowherds. The tale of early loss, however, is overwritten by images of profuse care and love that his foster parents, especially his mother Yashoda, showered over him. Vaisnav *bhakts,* male and female, aspiring to approach the god with *vatsalya,* identify with her. Krishna's *balyaleela*—the sport of his infancy—had all the earthly miraculousness of every human child: bewitching smiles and a tender beauty, naughtiness and greed, an endless capacity for demanding and giving love. But the holy child was indubitably more than a human baby. He lifted the Govardhan hills, punished a wicked demoness, slept with a snake. Eventually, he left Vrindavan to become king in Mathura, plunging his mother into eternal grief. Narratives of his enchanting childhood finish on a note of deep sorrow. If power and glory befitted the god, its human costs are also displayed by the sacred lore. For the early life in Vrindaban possesses a poignant sweetness absent from the chronicles of mature majesty. It helps to cement devotion as an immediate and vivid response based on the personal experience of the devotee. Interestingly, Bengali accounts of *balyaleela* stress the relatively modest plenitude ofVrindavan householders where Krishna grew up. The western Indian Ballabhacharya sect, which also worships Krishna as a child, prefers to cast him as the royal child framed in splendour. [40]

Perhaps in imitation of Krishna narratives, Chaitanya's biographies, in Sanskrit and in Bengali, create his own *balyaleela* as a site replete with signs of divinity. [41] Bengali Vaisnavs in the seventeenth century arrived at a compromise with Chaitanya's Vrindaban-based disciples,

the learned brahman Goswamis, whereby the saint was now elevated as a reincarnation of Krishna. But, paradoxically, they also underline signs of devotion, irrelevant for the divine but supremely important for the saint. They too weave together the universal miraculousness of all mortal children along with Chaitanya's miraculous exceptionality which signified, at the very least, a semi-divinity. Strangely, only Brindaban Das, a young contemporary of Chaitanya and his first Bengali biographer, describes Chaitanya's household as poverty stricken: a family which at times even had to go without the daily meal. All others, in sharp contrast, describe the child being treated like a prince. Everything about him was superlative, especially his breathtaking beauty, which made brahmans conclude that he was an incarnation of Narayana himself. Music sounded wherever he walked, he was immensely precocious, crawling away from home when a month old. [42] Most prodigious was his early naughtiness, his unruly brilliance. He especially delighted in breaking caste and purity-pollution taboos, eating unclean leftover food, and snatching away the special food which a pure brahman was about to consume. Hagiographies mentioned his deviance only to immediately transfigure it as portents of holiness. The offended brahman glimpsed the fourarmed Vishnu just beyond the child, and the mother could see the whole universe in the baby's tiny yawn. The flouting of caste by the future saint anticipated his own later overturnings of hierarchy. At the same time, the implications of caste reversal were contained and refigured as a licence that holy figures, as extra social beings, ought to possess. The nineteenth-century Shakta saint Ramakrishna Paramhansa was such an unruly child, disobedient and especially careless about prescribed norms. [43]

Intimations of sainthood and holiness were read into every childhood act of Chaitanya, perhaps more so than in Krishna narratives since Krishna is recognized easily and indubitably as god on earth. Hagiographies of Chaitanya engaged in a more elaborate exercise. They recounted in thicker detail the elements of a human childhood. At the same time, the narration of childhood is loaded with subtler subtexts, clues to the divine in the human. Chaitanya loved to innovate and lead in team games, especially water sports and ball games. In fact, his

biographies tell us a lot about boys' games at the time of their composition. The favourite sport was to pollute orthodox brahmans when they worshipped or meditated close to the river at Nabadwip—an anticipation of Chaitanya bhakti's imminent rivalry with Naiyayik and Smarta pandits and the savant's disregard for conventional social injunctions. He loved to play-act with his friends. But, surreptitiously, the play-acting, at its peak, moved into an ecstatic chanting of Krishna's name which sent bystanders off into trances and made the child himself fall unconscious with emotional excitement—chronicle of a sainthood foretold. Like Krishna, he fills his mother with bliss and joy, only to leave her forever. If his naughty brilliance recalls the child Krishna, there is also an ingrained difference. It also shows amazing signs of devotion, whereas Krishna's miracles pointed at his divinity, he being above devotion: the difference between the god and the saint. [44]

IV

Let us come now to the childhood of this low-caste guru. Balakdas was a child who was much loved by all, especially by his mother and aunt. A certain measure of female worship seems a constant in all three holy lives. Moreover, Krishna, Chaitanya, and Balak left behind them heartbroken women, hopelessly yearning. Divinity, to blossom fully, requires the imprint of the woman's pain which the god or the saint needs to disregard. Balak's mother and aunt died in his absence as he apprenticed himself to his guru and went on a long pilgrimage with him. It was the affection of local brahmans that, however, mattered most. Balak was specially privileged to go beyond the popular devotional resources that Gaudiya Vaisnavism provided for plebeian devotees to gain access to the entire sacred canon, even the Sanskrit texts, from which shudras were normally barred. It was his childhood activities that brought about this transformation.

He was from an early age a serious and pious child, obedient with family elders and social superiors. Like Chaitanya, he fell into trances when Krishna's name was chanted and would talk to unseen presences, including someone he called Madhusudan *dada* (elder brother

Madhusudan). At first mystified, village brahmans soon remembered that Madhusudan was another name for Krishna, and knew then that the child probably could see and talk to him. They took him to Nakul for sacred learning. It was, therefore, a life entirely transfigured by brahmanical intervention. He left his family, kin, and caste group early and never came back—a tale of upward mobility, in its own way.

The hagiography talks much about his worship of his guru, reminding us that though the disciple serves the guru, he is also the guru's beloved and that the relationship lasts through all births. In its combination of servitude and love, hierarchy and intimacy, the *guru—shishya* relationship recalls the tenets of Hindu conjugality, the *shishya* corresponding to the wife. Common to all gurus and disciples, the intimate hierarchy is especially laden with meanings in Balak's case since it replays the larger caste encounters within Gaudiya Vaisnav congregations. Though Nakul belonged to Nityananda's sect, which made relatively light of caste distinctions, Balak himself took a different path. He preached absolute obedience to brahmans and the absolute inferiority of shudras, combining thus *raganuga* or the emotional approach in bhakti with *vaidhi* or the path of social injunctions. It is significant that brahmans defied caste injunctions by giving the shudra access to the full canon. The shudra, however, preached conformity to caste. [45]

Different castes are allotted a graded access to religious life on the principles of *adhikarbhed,* the hierarchized access to sacred truth. A suggestive contrast can, therefore, be drawn between this shudra boy's proof of bhakti and the childhood feats of the young Chaitanya. Gaudiya Vaisnavism, despite its distrust of the intellect, chose to invest young Chaitanya with generous amounts of extraordinary intelligence, whereas for the shudra Balakdas the first intimations of grace are relegated to the realm of the ecstatic and the mystical.

The young Chaitanya, moreover, was full of rebellious brilliance; he violated pollution taboos, defied his elders, was combative and disrespectful of authority. He mocked the scholarship of Nabadwip pandits and defeated them in disputations over abstruse matters. Balak,

on the other hand, was the good shudra child, devout, obedient, pious, and submissive. The different models of holy childhood, of the appropriate signs of religious beginning, would thus seem to allow a greater latitude to the upper-caste child. He alone could play at the boundaries of the norms, to transcend them as a mark of his autonomy. The shudra savant, on the other hand, established a capacity for religious leadership by his demonstrated submission to his social superiors.

Let me quickly recapitulate the distinctions among different models of holy childhood. The child Krishna is the Lord himself from early infancy, deferring to none and having no need of expressing devoutness. Chaitanya is both a *bhakt* and a demi-god, an incarnation. His early miraculous feats express elements of divinity as well as bhakti. Balak does not possess divine aspects. His extra mundane achievements express his nearness to god. He is the great *bhakt*. It is interesting that tales of his late-life miracles highlight his commitment to the discipline of caste. He could feed unscheduled brahman guests royally as food would always suddenly arrive from unknown quarters to help him out. Some sceptical boys were miraculously visited by strange afflictions when they fed an unsuspecting Balak with ritually unclean, non-vegetarian food. His miracles thus were lessons in social conformism. While Balak could not ritually initiate brahmans, Gopal, as sacred idol, was worshipped by all castes. At the same time, because Balak was the idol's custodian, his lived relationship with a living god made him greater than brahmans, proof that God favoured him above all others. It was through such looped paradoxes that Gaudiya Vaisnav proselytization worked out its potential for a limited yet real inclusiveness and community formation.

Krishna as god incarnate, the upper-caste founder of a great movement, and a local low-caste savant—for all narratives that deal with these three figures, childhood is an important place for two reasons. First, for inspiring love in devotees, as the child summons affection more sumptuously than any other kind of figure. Second, in a very different way, to transform sheer love into awe as childhood feats invariably denote extraordinary futures. In significant ways, too, god, great leader,

and subaltern saint both share qualities and do not. In a sense, the markers that separate Krishna from Chaitanya are repeated in the signs that differentiate between Chaitanya and Balakdas. Bhakti required a submergence of the socially marked self as well as its recuperation. Childhood is important as a universal state but is deployed to designate social particularities.

V

But what of Balak's Gopal, the child god who is nurtured by a shudra father? One night, Nakul had a strange dream. He heard Gopal crying out to him to rescue him from the river. At dawn he went to the riverside and found some perplexed fishermen whose fishing net seemed to be stuck in the riverbed. As soon as Nakul touched it, the net lifted and out leapt a little golden idol of Balgopal, in the typical crawling posture, one arm raised, and a candy clutched in its tiny fist. Incidentally, this particular Gopal, unlike his familiar dark forms, is always all gold, absorbing, perhaps, the quality of great fairness that had marked Chaitanya-Gouranga. When Balak later chose his moment of death, he evaporated in a haze of gold, indicating his full merger with the golden child. Anyway, Gopal went straight into Nakul's arms and went home with him. After Nakul left for his final pilgrimage, Balak took care of Gopal though he was desperately poor and trying hard to complete his own mystic quest or *sadhana*. Gopal, a naughty and demanding child, disrupted it all the time, demanding food, chats, cuddles, and a proper home.

One night, the heavens opened up, blowing away the roof of their hut. As the torrential rains poured down, the drenched child burrowed into his father's bosom, shivering and whispering 'Father, I am so cold.' This broke Balak's heart. He left his own religious quest and went around looking for material advancement. He found it among traders who had heard of the holy child. They built a fine temple which locals named Gopalbari or the house of Gopal; the child, after all, had wanted a proper house. Later, an ashram and a boomimg annual festival were added to his properties. [46]

The demanding divine child, asking for food, shelter, home, recurs in other tales of *vatsalya,* both Vaisnav and non-Vaisnav. One of the female devotes of Ramakrishna possessed an idol of Gopal who came alive for her and fed from her hands. She came to be known as the Mother of Gopal, Gopaler Ma. [47] An associate of Chaitanya, Gobinda Ghosh, similarly, came into the possession of a piece of wood in the river and Chaitanya asked him to carve a Gopal out of it. The child lived for him and he devoted all his time to him, till he got married and had a son himself. Then the two loves of his life began to clash: he could not make out clearly which was the human child and which the divine. Irritated by his absorption in his son, a jealous Krishna caused the death of the son and, enraged, Govinda would no longer worship the real god. Krishna then promised to perform all the funerary rites for him after his death, and take the place of his son. Having promised, he asked impatiently to be fed: he had not been served so long, he was hungry. [48]

Interestingly, Gobinda Ghosh was believed in his lifetime by many contemporaries to be a Sadgop, a relatively high-ranking shudra. In the early nineteenth century the modern upper-caste hagiographer, however, firmly claims for him the superior *kayastha* rank, denying the lowlier Sadgop identity. Writing around the same time, when census operations had made the niceties of *jati* an absorbing and contentious topic, the upper-caste hagiographer of Balakdas, on the other hand, allows him to represent good and clean shudras, allowed to give water to brahmans.

There are some interesting inversions in Balak's hagiography. The human is the saviour twice in Balak's tale, while it is the divine who is saved. Visualizing the god as a child, then, enables an amazing access to activism and initiative to the human devotee, even some measure of power and control over the divine: a switching around of human and divine functions as the god is supposedly the universal nurturer and protector. Worship of the child god, then, is a sort of a theatre of devotion where the human making of the divine is implicitly enacted. Nakul and Balak are both father and mother to Gopal. Each would

rescue the child and protect him like a father and then nurture him like a mother. In Balak's case, his earlier helplessness when Gopal demands material goods closely resembles the helplessness of the homebound mother. The god, on the other hand, is always the pathetic child, the eternally dependent subaltern figure. He solicits human intervention. It is by emphasizing his absolute vulnerability that he causes things to happen. The redistribution of conventional human and divine properties is quite remarkable, enabled by the child motif, by *vatsalya.*

The climatic point in the tale and also the moment of narrative departure, is the night of the storm. From a tale of domestic warmth and maternal love, it now shifts to the register of male enterprise. The night of the storm condenses an extremity of pain in an image of poverty and love, locked in helpless embrace, expressing what Marx had said about religion in general, 'the sigh of the oppressed, the heart of a heartless world.' [49] For what can be the most excruciating experience of poverty but that of the loving parent who has to watch his child suffer? If a subaltern religious imagery needs to weave social experiences of the deepest pain into itself to connect with the lived world of the devotee, there can be no image of greater power and conviction. The contrast between the resplendent royal child of Ballabhacharya maharajas and the naked child of Balakdas is a contrast between opposed devotional imaginaries generated by extremely divergent social experiences.

This especial power of childhood tales to create an affective subalternity is recapitulated in Shakta *agamani* songs as well. The Great Goddess is transformed into a wonderful little child, her pranks and her childlike grace inspiring tidal waves of love in her mother: 'Who says the autumn moon is comparable with her face? The moon lies shattered among the nails of her feet.' But she goes away, leaving the mother in aching pain and she, too, no doubt, is doomed to suffer the absence of her childhood home for long months. She returns for three days a year and the joy of reunion is shot through with the terror of certain loss. The mother pleads with the last night of her stay: 'Do not ever leave, O night of Navami.' [50]

Among Bengali Hindus, child marriage was pervasive, 8 being the ideal age to gift the daughter away. By the time they reached their mid or late twenties, therefore, most women would be simultaneously married daughters, missing their mothers, as well as mothers missing their married daughters. The songs spoke to both. The woman's vulnerability was given its most affective, intense, and poetic expression in images of her childhood. Childhood becomes a site of all that is most wondrous in this world and all that is most unjust.

At the same time, Gopal's demands bear rich fruit. In a curious way, the myth is a tale of upward mobility of both deity and devotee. Gopal climbs out of the river, out of the clutches of fishermen, into the arms of a learned brahman. He is then left to the shudra. The shudra, however, is a holy figure with mystical powers and sacred knowledge. Gopal is first caught in the net of fishermen—the original Jalia Kaivartas—from whose ranks Balak's own subcaste of Chasha Kaivartas had recently separated.

VI

Why are childhood and *vatsalya* so immensely important for Gaudiya Vaisnavs, with their looped needs of caste observance and caste transcendence? Let me conclude somewhat schematically. The child, in Hindu society, is the only being unaware of social norms and discipline; he has not yet been socialized into caste. In his ordinary movements he must touch, eat, and do what is forbidden, polluted. He alone, therefore, can belong to all, appropriated by all, gather all equally under his reign. He is the living transgression, the liminal place. At the same time, childhood is the unruly place that will eventually be left behind. It is also the place where socialization into class, caste, and gender, into norms of social differentiation, are initiated. We find, therefore, important divergences in expressive modes that narrate different forms of holy childhood: of the deity of all Vaisnavs, the brahman saint's, the low-caste guru's, and of a Gopal who, in this case, is the son of a shudra father. Through a delicate and subtle mobilization of these plural possibilities, the *vatsalya* of Gaudiya Vaisnavism manages the necessary transcendence-cum-recuperation of social difference.

Notes

Chapter 1

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Chapter 2

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Chapter 3

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[2.] The term orientalism is most widely associated with the work of Edward Said, who identified a wide range of past and contemporary Western thinkers with attitudes justifying or echoing colonial intellectual practices, especially those representing non-white peoples as irrational, violent, childlike, morally undeveloped, 'effeminated' and dangerously nclined towards extreme forms of belief and behaviour.

[3.] The term 'Aryavarta' was popularized by Hindu nationalists, and also by the Conservative peer Lord Ronaldshay Governor of Bengal at the time of the 1919

Amritsar massacre). Ronaldshay's ethnological polemic *The Heart of Aryavarta* (1925) sounded dire warnings about the supposedly dangerous nature of India's nationalist political awakening.

4. The ethnologists' favoured technique of anthropometry classified human 'types' on the basis of physical characteristics derived from zoological taxonomies, particularly skull shape (long-headed/'dolicho-cephalic' or shortheaded/' brachy-cephalic'). Some specialists also tested skin and eye colour; many advocated classifications based on measurements of asal width and facial structures.

5. Hunter attained renown with the publication of *Annals of Rural Bengal*, written when he was Collector of the remote hirbhum district. He became India's first Director General of Statistics (1871) and chief editor of the first Imperial Gazetteers of India.

6. These views about the supposedly corrupting consequences of interracial contact were shared by ethnological generalizers like Robert Knox, who discerned the 'mysterious unextinguishable dislike of race to race' as the central principle of humankind's evolutionary history, and regarded it as a key task of the ethnologist to warn against racial 'hybridization'.

7. Studies of European feudal law and land rights by the Victorian medievalists F.W. Maitland and P.G. Vinogranoff were crucial influence here. Marx himself regarded India as a cellular and fragmented society. Thus, while he emphasized material rather than religious or ideological factors, he adhered to fairly conventional orientalist views in representing the olonial conquest and resulting Westernization as the only social revolution that had ever taken place in the subcontinent.

8. For an attempt to rehabilitate the racial understanding of caste, see the Ethnographical reports in the *Census of India 1931* (I, sections A and B); while rejecting Risley's crucial differentiation between descendants of 'pure' Aryan invaders and 'aboriginal' Dravidians, J.H. Hutton and his collaborator B.S. Guha of the Indian Zoological Survey tried to use this Census to reaffirm the value of race science, using elaborate anthropometric techniques to create what they saw as a definitive analysis of India's 'racial constitution'.

Chapter 4

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4. Risley, *People of India,* p. 278.

5. Ibid., pp. 25-9; for William Crooke's criticism of Risley's views, see his introduction to the second edition, pp. xvi-xxii, and his own *Tribes and Castes of the Northwest Provinces and Oudh,* 4 vols (Calcutta, 1896).

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7. Herbert Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, vol. I (Calcutta, 1891), pp. i-ii; Risley, *People of India,* pp. 5, 109-10.

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13. Ibid., *Armies*, chapter 5.

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16. For British statuary, see Barbara Groseclose, 'Imag(in)ing Indians', *Art History,* vol. 13 (1990), pp. 488-525.

17. W. Foster (ed.), *Early Travels in India, 1583–1619* (New York, 1921), especially pp. 14-23; Romila Thapar, 'Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity', *Modern Asian Studies,* vol. 23 (1980), pp. 209-31; Sheldon Pollock, 'Ramayana and Political Imagination in India', *Journal of Asian Studies,* vol. 52 (1993), pp. 261-97.

18. Gyanendra Pandey, 'The Colonial Construction of "Communalism": British Writings on Banares in the Nineteenth Century', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies VI* (Delhi, 1989), pp. 132-68.

19. Inden, *Imagining India,* chapter 3, especially pp. 89-96.

20. Lyall, *Asiatic Studies* (1884), chapter 1, and the revised edition (London, 1904).

21. Ibid. (1904), p. 318; Inden, *Imagining India,* pp. 109-22.

22. Kenneth W. Jones, 'Religious Identity and the Indian Census', in Barrier (ed.), *The Census,* pp. 73-101.

23. Mill, chapter 10, esp. p. 304; see also Ronald Inden, 'Orientalist Constructions of India', *Modern Asian Studies,* vol. 20 (1986), especially pp. 404-8, 423-4.

Chapter 5

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1. W.H. Rattigan, *A Digest of Civil Law for the Punjab, Chiefly Based on the Customary Law as at Present Ascertained,* 13 th edn, revised by Om Prakash Aggarawala, Allahabad, 1953, pp. xv-xvi. Some of the research used in this article was funded by a grant from the South Asia Program of the Social Science Research Council, with funds provided by the Near and Middle East Research and Training Act.

2. Punjab Archives, Lahore (hereafter PAL), Political Department Proceedings (hereafter PDP), file no. 11-24, vol. 1, 29/5/58 [R. Temple, Secretary to Chief Commissioner Punjab], to John Lawrence, Chief Commissioner Punjab, 14 May [1858?], para. 8. Emphasis in the original.

3. Rosane Rocher, 'British Orientalism in the Eighteenth Century: The Dialectics of Knowledge and Government', in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, eds, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, Delhi, 1994, pp. 215-49.

4. Denzil Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes*, Lahore, 1916.

5. Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1999, p. 139, and Ibbetson, pp. 4-6; see Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton, 2001, for a recent and thorough discussion of orientalist cliches and their relationship to emergent meanings of caste within the British administration.

6. Sumit Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India, 1200–1991*, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 30-61.

7. Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State: Social Formations in the Mid-First Millennium B.C. in the Ganga Valley,* Delhi, 1984, p. 10.

8. Romila Thapar, 'Genealogy as a Source of Social History', in *Ancient Indian Social History, Some Interpretations,* New Delhi, 1978, p. 328.

9. Dirk H.A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450–1850,* Cambridge, 1990, pp. 57-8.

10. Kolff, pp. 109 and 133.

11. David Gilmartin, *'Biraderi* and Bureaucracy: The Politics of Muslim Kinship Solidarity in Twentieth Century Punjab', *International Journal of Punjab Studies,* vol. I (I), 1994, pp. 3-4.

12. W.G. Osborne, *The Court and Camp ofRanjeet Singh,* reprint, Delhi, 1973, pp. xxi-xxii. Emphasis in the original.

13. J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab,* Cambridge, 1990; New Delhi, 1994, p. 93.

14. Veena Sachdeva, *Polity and Economy of the Punjab during the Late Eighteenth Century,* New Delhi, 1993, pp. 94-7. For a colourful account of the career of Dhara Singh of the Gugera family between 1846 and 1858, see the accumulated correspondence in PAL, PDP file no. 31-33, 18/9/58.

15. F. Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian—English Dictionary,* reprint, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 88 and 995; John T. Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English*, London, 1911; reprint Lahore, 1994, pp. 63 and 796. It is worth noting

that in the most frequently cited Arabic-English dictionary 'caste' does not appear among the permutations. Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic,* J. Milton Cowan, ed., 3d edn, Ithaca, 1976, p. 800.

16. In other parts of India, these tracts were more numerous, as a wider range of lineages sought official recognition as landowners and other privileged classes. Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India,* p. 92.

17. Maulvi Nur Muhammad Chela Sial, *Tarikh-e-Jhang Sial,* 1863, pp. 12, 20. The author also uses *qaum* in the phrases *qaum-e-punwar* and *aqwam-e-rajput,* suggesting the further flexibility of the term. *Tarikh- e-Jhang Sial,* p. 4.

18. The District Gazetteer of Montgomery District does claim that 'enmity to the Sials was the bowl of union among the Kharrals', but this remark comes at the end of a plot summary of the *qissa* of Mirza-Sahiban which singles out the (Upera) Kharals of Danabad as the social unit engaged in combat, rather than the entire array of Kharal subdivisions. *Montgomery District Gazetteer 1883–84,* pp. 62-3.

19. *Political Diaries of Lt Reynell G. Taylor, et al., 1847–1849,* Allahabad, 1915, p. 433. Pindi Bhattian sits approximately 10 km from the east bank of the Chenab River, 35 km north-east of Chinlot, a total distance of 145 km from Kamalia.

20. For example, PAL, Revenue Department Proceedings (hereafter RDP), file no. 75-77, 13/7/50. No. 201, M.P. Edgeworth, Commissioner (hereafter C) Multan, to P. Melvill, Secretary to Board of Administration, Punjab, 3 July 1850.

21. *Chenab Colony Gazetteer, 1904,* pp. 16-17.

22. H.L.O. Garrett and G.L. Chopra, eds, *Events at the Court of Ranjit Singh, 1810–1817,* Lahore, 1935; reprint, Patiala, 1970, pp. 132 and 144, for example. Compare with Muhammad Sadiq Khan of Bahawalpur, to whom the court reports always refer as 'Nawab'.

23. Garrett and Chopra, *Events at the Court of Ranjit Singh,* pp. 246 and 258; *Jhang District Gazetteer 1883–84,* p. 36.

24. *Press Lists of Old Records in the Punjab Civil Secretariat Record Office, Lahore,* vol. XVI, 'Chief Commissioner's Administration, Punjab, in the Revenue Department', Lahore, n.d.

25. Peter Penner, *The Patronage Bureacracy in North India: The Robert M. Bird and James Thompson School, 1820–1870,* Delhi, 1986, ch. 10.

26. Andrew J. Major, *Return to Empire: Punjab under the Sikhs and British in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, Karachi, 1996.

27. W.L. Conran and H.D. Craik, *Chiefs and Families of Note in the Punjab,* vol. I, Lahore, 1909, all three volumes reprinted as a single volume, Lahore, 1993, pp. i-viii.

28. The Oriental and India Office Collection, London (hereafter OIOC), Punjab RDP (General) 9A August, no. 447, H.E. Perkins, C. Multan, to Secretary to the Financial C (hereafter FC) Punjab, 8 May 1882, para 6.

29. OIOC, Punjab RDP (Revenue) 5A September 1891, no. 174, H.C. Cookson, Deputy C (hereafter DC) Multan, to C. Lahore, 7 May 1890, para 9.

30. OIOC, Punjab RDP (Revenue) 2A November 1893, no. 298, Lt Col. J.B. Hutchinson, C Lahore, to Senior Secretary to the FC Punjab, 28 March 1893, para. 4; orders passed in OIOC, Punjab RDP (Revenue) 9A November 1893, no. 246, J.M. Doule, Officiating Revenue Secretary to the Government Punjab, to Senior Secretary FC Punjab, 14 November 1893.

31. PAL, PDP file no. 31-3, 18/9/58, no. 492, Capt. B.T. Retd. DC Gugera, to Lt Col. G.W. Hamilton, C Multan, 1 July 1858, para 2.

32. PAL, PDP file no. 31-3, no. 531, Capt. B.T. Retd, DC Gugera, to Lt Col. G.W. Hamilton, C Multan, 15 July 1858, para 3.

33. PAL, PDP file no. 31-3, 18/9/58, no. 266, R. Temple, Secretary to Chief Commissioner Punjab, to Secretary to Government [of India?], 18 September 1858, para. 4-5; for a tabular statement of government's final award to Dhara Singh, see PAL, PDP file no. 8-9, 12/5/60.

34. For a more thorough treatment of the relationship between officers of the Indian Civil Service, particularly Ibbetson, and Maine, see Clive Dewey, 'The Influence of Sir Henry Maine on Agrarian Policy in India', in Alan Diamond, ed., *The Victorian Achievement of Sir Henry Maine,* Cambridge, 1991, pp. 353-75.

35. C.L. Tupper, ed., *Punjab Customary Law,* vol. 2, Calcutta, 1881, p. 1.

36. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 17 and 21.

37. Allah Ditta *et al.* v. Beg, *48 P.R. 1909,* 160.

38. Ibid., 161.

39. The judge in Inayat v. Mt Bharai, *A.I.R., 1928 Lah. 291,* thought it best to disallow or avoid considering the genealogies, presented by *mirasis* from both complainants, as having been constructed expressly for the purpose of this case. According to Rose, *mirasis* were a type of menial labourer whose ordinary or 'traditional' duty was to memorize and recite genealogies of their patrons: H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province,* vol. 3, Lahore, 1914, pp. 105-19.

40. Mian Kasim v. Samail *et al., I.P.R. 1910,* pp. 11-12. The appellate court of course upheld the lower court's decision in this case.

41. Ibbetson's report on the Punjab Census was published in 1883; in the same year, a reprint of the sections of the Census report dealing with 'the Religions, the Languages, and the Races, Castes and Tribes of the people' was published under the title 'Panjab Ethnography.' The sections of the latter volume dealing with races, castes, and tribes were reprinted posthumously as *Punjab Castes* (see note 4, above). Publishers in India and Pakistan have reprinted *Punjab Castes* rather than the other volumes.

42. Ibid., *Punjab Castes*, pp. 1-2.

43. Ibid., p. 10.

44. Ibid., pp. ii and vii.

45. Ibid., p. 32.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid., p. 33.

48. Bernard S. Cohn, 'The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia', in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays,* Delhi, 1987, pp. 242-3.

49. E.B. Steedman, *Report on the Revised Settlement of the Jhang District of the Punjab, 1874–1880,* Lahore 1882.

50. Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab*, Berkeley, 1985.

51. A.E. Barstow, *The Sikhs: An Ethnology*, 1928; reprint, Delhi, 1985; A.H. Bingley, *Sikhs*, reprint, Patiala, 1970; J.M. Wilkeley, *Punjabi Musalmans*, Calcutta, 1915; R.T.I. Ridgway, *Pathans,* Calcutta, 1910; A.H. Bingley, *History, Caste & Culture of Jats and Gujars,* reprint, New Delhi, 1978. For each zone, Bingley gives a list of Jat clans and a brief description, followed by a list of Gujar clans with description.

52. For a thorough listing of these benefits, see Imran Ali, *The Punjab un-der Imperialism,* Princeton, 1988, and Tai Yong Tan, 'Maintaining the Military Districts: Civil-Military Integration and District Soldiers' Boards in the Punjab, 1919-1939', *Modern Asian Studies,* vol. 28 (4), 1994, pp. 833-74. These benefits tempted several families of Panjabis to claim martial race status: see Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab,* and the case of the Mahton Rajputs in Cohn, 'The Census . . . in South Asia', pp. 248-9.

53. For example, S.S. Thorburn, *Musulmans and Money-lenders in the Punjab*, Edinburgh and London, 1896; Malcolm Lyall Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt,* London, 1925; see also Clive Dewey's detailed treatment of Darling in his *Anglo-Indian Attitudes: The Mind of the Indian Civil Service,* London, 1993.

54. N.G. Barrier, *The Punjab Alienation of Land Bill of1900,* Durham, 1966; P.H.M. van den Dungen, *The Punjab Tradition: Influence and Authority in Nineteenth-Century India,* London, 1972; Imran Ali, *The Punjab under Imperialism*.

55. *Jhang District Gazetteer 1929,* pp. 53-4. See also C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770–1870,* Cambridge, 1983, p. 22; and *Multan District Gazetteer 1923-24,* pp. 92-3.

56. Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes,* pp. 19-20.

57. *Punjab Revenue Report 1891-92,* appendix E, p. xxviii.

58. OIOC, Punjab RDP (Irrigation) 2A, April 1893, Lt Col. J.W. Ottley, 'Notes on Inspection by Chief Engineer, Irrigations Works, Punjab', para. 55; OIOC, Punjab RDP (Irrigation) 6A, May 1893, 'Note by Lt Col. J.B. Hutchinson, C Lahore, on the Colonization of the Rakh Branch, Chenab Canal', para 2.

59. C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870,* Cambridge, 1997, p. 370.

60. James C. Scott, John Tehranian, and Jeremy Mathias, 'The Production of Legal Identities Proper to States: The Case of the Permanent Family Surname', *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* vol. 44(1), 2002, pp. 4-44.

61. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By,* Chicago and London, 1980, p. 26.

Chapter 6

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1. William H. Wiser. *The Hindu Jajmani System,* Lucknow, 1936. I have used the later edition cited in note 10. Full citations of the views mentioned in this introductory section are in the body of this article. I have excluded them here for the sake of clarity.

2. Thomas O. Beidelman. *A Comparative Analysis of the Jajmani System,* New York, 1959, pp. 5-6. The historically uninformed nature of Dumont's formulation was sharply attacked by C.J. Fuller, 'Misconceiving the Grain Heap: A Critique of the Concept of the Indian Jajmani System', in J. Parry and M. Bloch, eds, *Money and the Morality of Exchange,* Cam-bridge, 1989, pp. 54-5.

3. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order,* 1996; Indian Edition, Delhi, 1997.

4. Louis Dumont, *Homo hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications,* Chicago 1980, p. 206. A point sharply made by Michelguglielmo Torri, *Storja dell'India,* Roma, 2000. pp. x-xi.

5. A spurious understanding of 'economic agents' that I find sadly prevalent in some branches of the academic world. For a formal economic model of caste discrimination via social boycott, see George A. Akerlof, 'The Economics of Caste and of the Rat Race and Other Woeful Tales', *Quarterly Journal of Economics,* vol. 90(4), 1976, pp. 609-17.

6. It may be recollected that the 1931 Census of British India and the princely states counted 696,831 rural settlements classified as villages. See *Statistical Abstractfor British India—Eighteenth Issue,* Delhi, 1942, Table 1. A dozen is not an impressive sample of this diverse population.

7. C.J. Fuller, 'Misconceiving the Grain Heap', p. 57.

8. Morton Klass, *Caste: The Emergence of the South Asian Social System*, 1993; repr. Delhi. 1998, p. 132. Emphasis added.

9. Walter C. Neale, *Economic Change in Rural India,* New Haven, 1962, p. 5.

10. Waller C. Neale, in Karl Polanyi, C.M. Arensberg, and H.W. Pearson, eds, *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory,* Glencoe, 1957, p. 226. This formulation is contradicted by much of the rich ethnographic detail in the Wisers' own account of everyday life in Karimpur. See William H. Wiser and Charlotte Wiser, *Behind Mud Walls*, 1963; expanded edition, Berkeley, 2000, pp. 40-3.

[11.] Omprakash Valmiki, *Joothan* [in Hindi], Delhi, 1999, p. 21, my translation. An English translation of this book appeared from Samya, Calcutta, in 2002, and Columbia University Press, 2003.

[12.] Ibid., p. 18; see also note 34.

[13.] Dumont, *Homo hierarchicus,* p. 235. Dumont takes it in as a part of his sweeping analysis of 'Hindu' India: 'It has become common practice to apply the term "the *jajmani* system" to the system corresponding to the prestations and counter-prestations by which the castes as a whole are bound together in the village, and which is more or less universal in India' (p. 97).

[14.] Hiroshi Fukazawa, 'Rural Servants in the Maharashtrian Village: Demiurgic or Jajmani System?' *Hitotsubashi Journal of Economics* (1972); reprinted in *The Medieval Deccan: Peasants, Social Systems and States,* Delhi, 1991, pp. 198-244.

[15.] Dumont, *Homo hierarchicus*, p. 105.

[16.] Ibid., pp. 105-6.

[17.] For a lucid survey of the field of the economics of information, see Joseph Stiglitz, 'The Contributions of the Economics of Information to Twentieth Century Economics' *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 115(4), 2000, pp. 1441-78. For a survey of managerial hierarchies and the impact of recent changes in market structures, see N.R. Lamo- reaux, D.M.G. Raff, and P. Temin, 'Beyond Markets and Hierarchies: Toward a New Synthesis of American Business History', *American Historical Review,* vol. 108(2), 2003, pp. 421-9.

[18.] A.C. Pigou, *The Economics of Welfare*, London, 1920, pp. 244-5. For evidence, see Lamoreaux, *et al.,* 'Beyond Markets', p. 419.

[19.] Dumont, *Homo hierarchicus*, p. 104.

[20.] Ibid., pp. 97, 98-9.

[21.] I allude, of course, to the large multinational corporation with its multiple workplaces and tens of thousands of employees.

22. G.A. Akerlof and R.E. Kranton, 'Economics and Identity', *Quarterly Journal of Economics,* vol. 115(3), 2000, pp. 715-53.

23. Wiser, *The Hindu Jajmani System,* p. 108.

24. I classify this as speculative because he has no evidence for the antecedent centuries.

25. Peter Mayer, 'Inventing Village Tradition: The Late 19 th Century Origins of the North Indian "Jajmani" System', *Modern Asian Studies,* vol. 27(2), 1993, esp. pp. 378-86.

26. E.A.H. Blunt, *The Caste System of Northern India,* 1931; rpnt Delhi, 1969, pp. 245-6.

27. Department of Social Welfare, Govt. of India, *Report of the Committee on Customary Rights to Scavenging,* New Delhi, 1966, pp. 2-3.

28. Ibid., pp. 8-12, 20.

29. Ibid., p. 30. 'Jagir' was the term used for the exclusive right to clean the latrines of specified houses.

30. Simon Commander, 'The Jajmani System in North India', *Modern Asian Studies,* vol. 17(2), 1983, pp. 283-311.

31. A much more complete account based on an enormous range of sources was recently published by A.R. Kulkarni, 'The Maratha Baluta System', in idem, *Maharashtra: Society and Culture,* New Delhi, 2000, pp. 1-62. Important new work by other Japanese scholars became available in English in 1997 in Hiroyuki Kotani, ed., *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed,* Delhi, 1997. Very significant historical data supporting my argument is found in Masanori Sato, 'The Chamars of Southeastern Rajasthan A.D. 1650-1800', pp. 30-53; H. Kotani, 'Ati-shudra Castes in the Medieval Deccan', pp. 55-75; and 'Conflict and Controversy over the Mahar Watan', pp. 105-31.

32. Fukazawa, 'Rural Servants', pp. 208-9.

33. Ibid.,*passim,* esp. pp. 238-9.

34. Ibid., pp. 232-3.

35. Thomas Coats, 'Account of the Present State of the Township of Lony', *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay,* vol. 3, 1823, p. 191.

36. H.H. Mann, *Land and Labour in a Deccan Village I: Pimpla Soudagar,* Bombay, 1917, p. 123; he adds that the real reason for the presence of a Muslim butcher was 'that in the high Maratha families there has crept in, we know not how, a feeling that flesh before being eaten must have been blessed by the *munzawar* or priest of the local Mohamedan saint or *peer*.'

37. Max Weber, *General Economic History,* trans. Frank H.Wright, Glencoe, 1950, p. 22.

38. The consequences of refusal in the early 1950s are vividly described by Omprakash Valmiki. Some Dalits had been refusing unpaid service to their *jajmans*: the latter decided to teach them a lesson. They used the visit of a government employee as a pretext. When the Dalits refused his summons to unpaid labour, two policemen came and rounded up ten of them at random. They were made to squat with their hands holding their ears, and beaten with a bamboo cudgel. 'The sepoy beating them grew exhausted with the effort. The beaten man cried out at each blow.' *Juthan,* pp. 50-1.

39. W.H. Sykes, 'Special Report on the Statistics of the Dukhun', in *Reports of the Seventh Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science,* 1837, p. 291.

40. W.H. Sykes, 'On the Land Tenures of the Dekhan', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society,* vol. 2, 1835, p. 227.

41. Printed in R.D. Choksey, ed., *Period of Transition (1818–1826),* Poona, 1945, pp. 202, 204.

42. Bheel Agent to Collector of Candeish, 30 June 1825, in Maharashtra State Archives, Pune, Deccan Commissioner's Records, vol. 202, doc. no. 1782. Emphasis added.

43. Appasaheb Pavar, ed., *Tarabaikalitia Kagadpaire—khandpalilta,* Kolhapur, 1969, pp. 335-7. The language of this order obviously reflects the way the dispute

was presented to Pilaji by the headmen and local gentry.

44. R.V. Oturkar, ed., *Peshvekalin Samajik va Arthik Patravyvahara,* Pune, 1950, pp. 65-6.

45. W.H. Sykes, 'Special Report', p. 291, p. 292 (emphasis added).

46. Both cases from Oturkar, *Patravyavahara,* pp. 31-2, 38.

47. L.B. Jagalpure and K.D. Kale, *Sarola Kasar,* Ahmednagar, 1938, p. 385.

48. This special legislation is in itself testimony to the frequency of such conflict.

49. T.N. Atre, *Ganv Gada,* 1915; rpnt. Pune, 1991, pp. 90, 96, 99-102. No less an authority than D.R. Gadgil acknowledged the importance of Atre's book: see his introduction to Dandekar and Jagtap (cited in note 53).

50. D.R. Gadgil, 'Preface' to *Maharashtrachi Gramma Samajtrachna,* p. 3.

51. M.B. Jagtap, *Wai Talukyatil Purva Bhagatil Shell Vatchal,* Pune, 1970, pp. 107-14.

52. Daya Pavar, *Balutam,* 1978; sixth edition, Mumbai, 1995, pp. 56-8.

53. V.M. Dandekar and M.M. Jagtap, *Maharashtrachi Gramina Samajarachna,* Pune, 1957, pp. 45-70. The comments of one referee compel me to add that these intensive team studies of a scientifically selected sample of villages are significantly more dependable than the assortments of a few villages in various regions at various times from which anthropological models have typically been constructed.

54. Jenkins, *Report on the Territories of the Raja of Nagpur 1927,* Nagpur, Government Press, 1923.

55. British Library, London, Oriental and India Office Collection (henceforth OIOC), Mss Marathi D 35, tbl. 35a.

56. OIOC Mss Marathi D 46 fol. 231 b.

57. Ibid., fol.61b.

58. OIOC Mss Marathi D 44 fol. 118a.

59. Ibid., fol. 108b.

60. Ibid., Account of Chimur Q. 40.

61. Ibid., Account of Umrad Q. 19 and 40.

62. Ibid., Umrad Q. 9.

63. N.G. Chapekar, ed., *Peshvaichya Savlil,* Pune, 1938. pp. 101-14. These records range in time from 1754 to 1825 CE.

Chapter 7

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1. Louis Dumont, *Homo hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications*, Chicago, 1970, pp. 215-16.

2. A.M. Hocart, *Caste: A Comparative Study,* London, 1950; Declan Quigley, *The Interpretation of Caste,* Oxford, 1993, pp. 114-41.

3. Patrick Peebles, *Social Change in Nineteenth Century Ceylon,* New Delhi, 1995, pp. 44-5. For similar views, see A.P. Kannangara, 'The Rhetoric of Caste Status in Modern Sri Lanka', in Peter Robb, ed., *Society and Ideology: Essays in South Asian History Presented to Professor K.A. Ballhatchet,* Delhi, 1993, pp. 110-11; Kitsiri Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750–1900: A Study of Religious Revival and Change,* Berkeley, 1976, p. 46; and Bryce Ryan, *Caste in Modern Ceylon: The Sinhalese System in Transition,* New Brunswick, 1953, pp. 3-21.

4. Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age,* Cambridge, 1999; Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism*

and the Making of Modern India, Princeton, 2001. While Bayly and Dirks frame their studies within mutually hostile 'schools', their narratives are broadly similar and exhibit only some differences in emphasis. Neither book mentions Lanka.

5. Dirks, *Castes of Mind,* p. 5.

6. For general accounts of eighteenth-century social organization in the southwest, see D.A. Kotelawele, 'Some Aspects of Social Change in the South West of Sri Lanka *c.* 1700-1833', *Social Science Review,* no. 4, 1988; Peebles, *Social Change,* pp. 34-51; and Michael Roberts, *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation: The Rise of a Karava Elite in Sri Lanka 1500-1931,* Cambridge, 1982, pp. 75-98.

7. Roberts, *Caste Conflict,* pp. 18-32.

8. C.R. de Silva, 'Sri Lanka in the Early Sixteenth Century: Economic and Social Conditions', in K.M. de Silva, ed., *University of Peradeniya History of Sri Lanka,* vol. 2, Peradeniya, 1995, p. 48; C.R. de Silva, 'Expulsion of the Portuguese from Sri Lanka', in de Silva, *University of Peradeniya History,* vol. 2, pp. 179-80.

9. S. Arasaratnam, 'The Dutch Administration', in de Silva, *University of Peradeniya History*, vol. 2, pp. 349-80.

10. S. Arasaratnam, 'Elements of Social and Economic Change in Dutch Maritime-Ceylon (Sri Lanka), 1658-1796', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (hereafter *IESHR)* (1985), vol. 22.1, p. 40.

11. Kotelawele, 'Some Aspects of Social Change'.

12. Quoted in ibid., p. 67.

13. Ibid., pp. 69-70.

14. Ibid., pp. 75-89.

15. Roberts, *Caste Conflict,* p. 69.

16. Kotelawele, 'Some Aspects of Social Change', p. 64.

17. Ibid., p. 75.

18. S. Arasaratnam, 'Social History of a Dominant Caste Society: The Vellalar of North Ceylon in the 18th Century', *IESHR* (1981), vol. 18.3-4.

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Chapter 8

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84. Sahasrabuddhe to Chatfield, 29 November 1894, Ed. Dept. 1895, vol. 45, MSA. The other pensioned officers were Subhedar Surennak Kondenak, Subhedar Jayanak Hamak, Subhedar Sevnak Changnak, Subhedar Ramnak Deonak, Subhedar Khod Mehtar, Subhedar Ramnak Mainak (B.R. Ambedkar's father), and Jamadar Sapnak Hoknak. Petition to Nugent from Pensioned Native Officers, Dapoli, 8 February 1894, Ed. Dept. 1895, vol. 45, MSA. The Mahar population numbered 85,513, while Chambhars Jingars numbered 10,694 in Ratnagiri district in 1880 *Maharashtra State Gazetteers, Ratnagiri District,* Bombay, 1880, p. 129.

85. Sahasrabuddhe to Chatfield, 29 November 1894.

86. Ed. Dept. 1886, vol. 40, MSA.

87. Ed. Dept. 1885, vol. 43, MSA.

88. Sahasrabuddhe to Chatfield, 29 November 1894; Summary of vernacular correspondence accompanying Drew's letter, 26 April 1894; and Drew to Sahasrabuddhe, 26 April 1894, Ed. Dept. 1895, vol. 45, MSA.

89. Nugent to Lee-Warner, 30 June 1894, Ed. Dept. 1895, vol. 45, MSA. The 14 primary school children were divided: seven in Standard III, four in Standard II, and three in Standard I.

90. Report of Barve, 3 April 1894, Ed. Dept. 1895, vol. 45, MSA; Sahasrabuddhe to Chatfield, 29 November 1894; Summary of the vernacular correspondence accompanying Drew's letter, 26 April 1894.

91. Sahasrabuddhe to Chatfield, 29 November 1894; Nugent to Drew, 2 May 1894, Ed. Dept. 1895, vol. 45, MSA.

92. Pensioned Native Officers, Dapoli, to Nugent, 8 February 1894, Ed. Dept. 1895, vol. 45, MSA; *Din Bandhu,* 1 January 1893.

93. Sahasrabuddhe to Chatfield, 29 November 1894; Nugent to Drew, 2 May 1894.

94. Pensioned Native Officers, Dapoli, to Nugent, 8 February 1894; Report of Barve, 3 April 1892.

95. Sahasrabuddhe to Chatfield, 29 November 1894; Nugent to Drew, 2 May 1894.

96. Pensioned Native Officers, Dapoli, to Nugent, 8 February 1894; Sahasrabuddhe to Chatfield, 29 November 1894.

97. Sahasrabuddhe to Chatfield, 29 November 1894; Report of Barve, 3 April 1892.

98. Nugent to Drew, 2 May 1894.

99. *Din Bandhu,* Letter from G.B. Valangkar, 15 April 1894, p. 3.

100. Ibid., Letter from Valangkar, 20 May 1894, pp. 2-3.

101. Ibid., Letter from Valangkar, 15 April 1894, p. 3. Other members included M.R. Savatarkar, R.G. Palavankar, G.R. Boraghavakar and B. Boraghavakar, V.D. Abodkar, B.B. Gimonkar, V. Devalkar and S.N. Jalgavakar.

102. Ibid., Letter from Valangkar, 7 August 1895; G.B. Valangkar, *Vinanti Patra* (Petition Letter), Bombay, 1889.

103. C.B. Khalmode, *Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar Charitra* (Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar—*A* Biography), vol. II, Bombay, 1968, pp. 218-21; S. Ralkar, ed., *AmhiPahtlele Phule* (Phule As We Saw Him), Pune, 1891, p. 37.

104. Raikar, *Amhi Pahtlele Phule,* pp. 16-17; P.S. Patil, *Mahatma Jotirao Phule Yanche Charitra* (A Biography of Mahatma Jotirao Phule), 1928, p. 137. See also R. Dhale, 'Dalit Sahitya Purvadhar: Gopal Babanche Vinanti Patra' (Early Dalit Literature: Gopal Baba's Petition Letter) in *Dhammallpi,* vol. 1(5), 14 April 1988, pp. 16-17; R. Daware, 'Gopal Baba Valangkar', in R. Daware, *Mangav Parishad 62 va Smriti Mahotsav* (Mangav Conference 62nd Commemorative Celebration), Kolhapur, 1980, pp. 1-9; G. Pantavane, *Vadalanche Vanshaj* (The Storm-worn Lineage), Kolhapur, 1984; R. Yadav, 'Gopal Baba Valangkar', *Siddha,* vol. XVI, 1982, pp. 78-87.

105. J. Phule, 'Brahman Teachers in the Education Department', *Satyadipika,* Pune, June 1869, p. 88 (see R. O'Hanlon, *Caste Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low-Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India,* Cambridge, 1985, pp. 214-50).

106. Ibid., p. 89.

107. *Din Bandhu*, 'Abhang' from Valangkar, 30 September 1894.

108. Ibid., Letter from Valangkar, 6 January 1895.

109. Ibid., Letter from Valangkar, 7 April 1895.

110. Ibid., Letter from Valangkar, 31 October 1895.

111. Ibid., Letter from Valangkar, 7 April 1895.

112. Valangkar, *Vinanti Patra,* p. 20.

113. J. Phule, *Gulamgiri* (Slavery), Pune, 1873, p. 81, in D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, eds, *Mahatma Phule Samagra Vadmya* (Mahatma Phule Collected Works), Bombay, 1969.

114. J. Phule, *Memorial Addressed to the Education Commission,* Pune, 1882, p. 169; idem, *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma Pustak* (Book of Universal True Religion), Pune, 1891, p. 405; and idem, *Gulamgiri,* p. 82, in Keer and Malshe, *Mahatma Phule Samagra Vadmya.*

115. Phule, *Gulamgiri,* p. 128; idem, *Memorial Addressed to the Education Commission,* p. 169.

116. *Din Bandhu,* 6 June 1897.

117. Ibid., 'Abhang' from Valangkar, 30 September 1894, Valangkar, *Vinanti Patra*, p. 12.

118. Nugent to Drew, 2 May 1894.

119. *Rig Veda,* 10.90.12.

120. Nugent to Lee-Warner, 30 June 1894.

121. Barve to Drew, 13 June 1894; Ed. Dept. 1895, vol. 45, MSA.

122. Drew to Nugent, 26 April 1894, Ed. Dept. 1895, vol. 45, MSA; Nugent to Drew, 2 May 1894; Doderei, Acting Collector of Ratnagiri, to Nugent, 12 June 1894, Ed. Dept. 1895, vol. 45, MSA. Mandagad school had 52 caste Hindu students and 8 Mahar students in 1894.

123. Drew to Nugent, 2 May 1894.

124. Fawcett, Administration Report, Satara District, 1892-3, Ed. Dept. 1894, vol. 34, para 18, MSA.

125. Weir, Administration Report, *1891–2,* Ed. Dept. 1893, vol. 58, MSA.

126. Sahasrabuddhe to Chatfield, 1 August 1895, Ed. Dept. 1895, vol. 45, MSA; *Satya Shodhak,* 30 June 1895; *Chandrodaya,* 18 July 1895, *NPR.*

127. *Mumbai Vaibhav,* 12 October 1895, *NPR.*

128. Petitions from the inhabitants of Alindra, 29 April 1903, Ed. Dept. 1903, vol. 40, MSA.

129. V.R. Kelkar, Assistant Deputy Collector-in-charge, to Drew, 14 October 1895, Ed. Dept. 1896, vol. 52; Petition from the Anarya Dosh Pariharak Mandal, Dapoli, 25 March 1901, Ed. Dept. 1901, vol. 33, MSA.

130. Nurullah and Naik, *A History of Education in India.*

131. B.T. McCully, *English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism*, Gloucester, Massachussets, 1966.

132. A. Seal, *The Emergence oflndian Nationalism,* Cambridge, 1971; D. Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance,* Berkeley, 1969.

133. Gumperz, 'English Education and Social Change', pp. 297-345; McDonald, 'English Education and Social Reform', pp. 453-70; G. Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India,* London, 1989.

134. Oddie, *Social Protest in India*; Forrester, *Caste and Christianity*; R.E. Frykenberg, 'Caste, Morality and Western Religion under the Raj', *MAS,* vol. 19(2), 1985, pp. 321-52; P. Carson, 'An Imperial Dilemma: The Propagation of Christianity in Early Colonial India', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History,* vol. 18(2), 1990, pp. 169-90.

135. On famine and conversion, see D. Kooiman, 'Mass Movement, Famine and Epidemic: A Study in Interrelationship', *MAS,* vol. 25(2), 1991, pp. 281-301.

136. See also G.A. Oddie, 'Christian Conversion in the Telugu Country, 1860-1900: A Case Study of One Protestant Movement in the Godavery-Krishna Delta', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 7(1), 1975, pp. 61-79; and idem, 'The Depressed Classes and Christianity', in idem, *Hindu and Christian in South-east India,* London, 1991, pp. 153-69; K.A. Ballhatchet, *Caste, Class and Catholicism in India 1789–1914,* London, 1998.

137. R.E. Frykenberg, 'Modern Education in South India, 1784-1854: Its Roots and Role as a Vehicle of Integration under Company Raj', *American Historical Review,* vol. 9(1), February 1986, pp. 37-65. For a theory of upward percolation of education, see G.A. Oddie, 'Christian Conversion among Non-Brahmans in Andhra Pradesh with Special Reference to the Anglican Missions and the Domakal Diocese, circa 1900-36', in G.A. Oddie, ed., *Religion in South Asia,* Delhi, 1977, pp. 67-99.

138. R. Hardgaves, *The Nadars of Tamilnad,* Berkeley, 1969.

139. Kooiman, *Conversion and Social Equality,* pp. 104-9, 127-35; K.K.N. Kurup, 'The Colonial Investment and Abolition of Slavery', *Journal of Kerala Studies,* vol.

XI (1-4), 1984, pp. 187-99.

140. R. Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nair Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore 1847–1908,* Delhi, 1976; K. Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State,* Delhi, 1998; Kooiman, *Conversion and Social Equality*; J.W. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity and People's Movement in Kerala*, Trivandrum, 1984.

141. Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nair Dominance,* pp. 34-62.

142. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity and People's Movement in Kerala.*

143. Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State,* pp. 77-9, 103-10.

144. Ibid., pp. 164-5.

145. Kooiman, *Conversion and Social Equality,* pp. 44, 142-3, 202; see also N. Pandit, 'Caste and Class in Maharashtra', *Economic and Political Weekly,* vol. XIV.7, 1979, p. 429; Oddie, *Social Protest in India,* pp. 6, 17; Forrester, *Caste and Christianity*, pp. 23-5.

146. Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings,* p. 447.

147. Bugge, *Mission and Tamil Society,* London, 1994; see also D.D. Hudson, *Protestant Origins in India: Tamil Evangelical Christians 1706–1835*, London, 1999.

148. For Protestant Christian missionary influence on Phule, see O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology,* pp. 105-32.

149. P. Constable, 'Early Dalit Literature and Culture', pp. 317-38; and 'The Marginalisation of a Dalit Martial Race in Late Ninet14e14th and Early Twentieth-Century Western I1414ia', *114m>JAS,* 2001 (forthcoming).

Chapter 9

*The essay draws on Samarendra (2011) published in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XLVI, no. 33. At various stages of writing I have benefited from comments by Gautam Bhadra, Neeladri Bhattacharya, Rohan D'Souza, and M.S.S. Pandian. Sangeeta Dasgupta has carefully read numerous drafts and made extensive changes. I thank them all. I am grateful to Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar for including the essay in the present volume.

1. Thus, the castes of the Central Province were placed in eleven, Madras in seventeen, and Bengal in thirteen groups (Waterfield 1875: 21).

2. Asia, Pacific and Africa Collection, British Library, London (hereafter APAC), Statistics and Commerce Department (hereafter SCD), L/E/2/84, Register 5393, No. 34, March 1880.

3. APAC, SCD, L/E/2/56, Register 1001, no. 58, April 1877.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. APAC, SCD, L/E/2/84, Register 5393, nos. 382-4, January 1878.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. APAC, SCD, L/E/2/84, Register 5393, no. 962, June 1878.

12. APAC, SCD, L/E/2/84, Register 5393, no. 1572A, June 1878.

13. APAC, SCD, L/E/2/56, Register 1001, no. 58, April 1877.

14. APAC, SCD, L/E/2/84, Register 5393, no. 34, March 1880.

15. APAC, SCD, L/E/2/84, Register 5393, nos. 382-84, January 1878.

16. Ibid.

17. APAC, SCD, L/E/2/84, Register 5393, no. 2287, August 1878.

18. APAC, SCD, L/E/2/84, Register 5393, no. 580C, August 1878.

19. APAC, SCD, L/E/7/73, Register 521, no. 1840, August 1882.

20. APAC, SCD, L/E/7/73, Register 521, no. 91 ^, January 1884.

21. APAC, SCD, L/E/7/215, Register 264/90, number not given, March 1890.

22. APAC, Mss. Eur. E100, folios 8-11.

23. APAC, SCD, L/E/7/226, Register 1165/90, no. 26, July 1890.

24. APAC, Revenue, Statistics and Commerce Department, L/E/7/440, Register 3306, no. 368, November 1900

25. The 'seven main physical types' were: Turko-Iranian, Indo-Aryan, Scytho-Dravidian, Aryo-Dravidian, Mongolo-Dravidian, Mongoloid and Dravidian (Risley 1903: 500).

26. Acknowledging that the rigidity of caste was not characteristic of other occupationally arranged societies, Ibbetson blamed the Brahmans for using their sacred office 'to preserve . . . and . . . perpetuate . . . the hereditary nature of occupation' (Ibbetson 1883: 173).

27. APAC, Proceedings of the Government of India (hereafter GOI), Home Department, Public Branch, P/3879, Proceeding 112, 1891, month not given.

28. APAC, GOI, Home Department, Public Branch, P/3879, Proceeding 115, February 1891. The list of recipients included both the academic institutions, i.e. the Royal Societies of London, Edinburgh, and Dublin, the universities of London, Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Dublin, the Royal Geographical Society, and the Anthropological Society of London, etc. (APAC, GOI, Home Department, Public Branch, P/3879, Proceeding 121, May 1891); and scholars, i.e. William Flower, Paul Topinard, Francis Galton, E.B. Taylor, Adolf Grunwelel, etc. (APAC, Government of Bengal, General Department, Miscellaneous Branch, P/4089, Proceeding 66, 1892, month not given).

Chapter 10

*Copyright © 1981 Frank F. Conlon. Reproduced by permission of the author. First published in N. Gerald Barrier (ed.), *Census in British India: New Perspectives*, Missouri: South Asia Books, and New Delhi: Manohar, 1981, pp. 103–17.

1. Bernard S. Cohn, 'The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia,' unpublished paper delivered at the Second European Conference on Modern South Asia, 1970. Cf. opinions in Kingsley Davis, *The Population of India and Pakistan* (Princeton, N.J., 1951), pp. 162-3.

2. Professor Narendra Wagle of the University of Toronto is currently compiling an extensive collection of legal materials on the Maratha domination in western India wherein a number of caste-ranking disputes arise.

3. Cf. Professor Jones' essays in this volume. [The volume referred to being N. Gerald Barrier (ed.), *Census in British India: New Perspect-ives.*—Eds]

4. A convenient compilation of census table formats for each decennial census from 1871-2 to 1971 is produced in D. Natarajan, *Indian Census Through a Hundred Years* (Delhi, 1972), vol. 2, pp. 17-448.

5. Census of India, 1901, vol. 15, Madras, pt 1 (Madras, 1902), pp. 123-4.

6. M.S. Kamath, *The Census of India* (Madras, 1914), pp. 10-13; S.F. Desai, *A Community at the Cross-road* (Bombay, 1948).

7. Kamath, op. cit., pp. 10-13.

8. Census ofIndia, 1921, vol. 8, Bombay Presidency, pt 2 (Bombay, 1922), pp. 57-8.

9. Paul R. Brass, 'Muslim Separatism in United Provinces: Social Context and Political Strategy before Partition,' *Economic and Political Weekly Annual Number 5* (January 1970).

10. G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India,* 5th edition (Bombay, 1969), p. 279.

11. Quoted in Census of India, 1891, Madras, vol. 1 (Madras, 1883), p. 103.

12. Census of India, 1901, vol. 9, Bombay Presidency, pt 1 (Bombay, 1902), p. 175. Emphasis added.

13. Census of India, 1921, vol. 8, Bombay Presidency, pt 1 (Bombay, 1922), p. 178. Enthoven had by this time headed the ethnographic survey in Bombay. His *Tribes and Castes* volumes were just being published.

14. *Fourth Samyukta Garuda Sarasvata Brahmana Parisad, Vasal, 1912 Hakigat* (Bombay, 1913), p. 34.

15. Census of India, 1911, vol. 14, Punjab, pt 1 (Lahore, 1912), p. 435.

16. In South Kanara district of Madras I traced at least twelve 'caste' names which had been appearing in connection with Saraswats or Gaud Saraswats in response during the early census reports to the question 'what is your caste?' These appear to have reflected varying understandings of the specificity required by the census. Cf. Ghurye, op.cit., p. 19.

17. Census of India, 1881, Madras, vol. 1 (Madras, 1883), p. 106.

18. Census of India, 1891, vol. 8, Bombay, pt 2 (Bombay, 1892).

19. Census of India, 1901, vol 15, Madras, pt 1 (Madras, 1902), p. 125.

20. E.g., Census of India, 1911, vol 10, Central Provinces and Berar, pt 2 (Allahabad, 1912), pp. 319-51; Census of India, 1911, vol. 15, United Provinces, pt 2 (Allahabad, 1912), pp. 714-53. In the same years several North Indian provinces, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, Assam, United Provinces, Punjab and Central Provinces and Berar gave details of the caste of gazetted officers and payers of income tax. Census of India, 1911, vol. 1, India, pt 1 (Calcutta, 1913), pp. 429-30.

21. Government of Bombay, *Caste Table: Bombay Province (Based on 1941 Census)* (Bombay, 1942), p. 2.

22. As Professor Schwartzberg indicates in his essay in this volume [see fn. 3 above—Eds], 'caste' did snarl economic enquiries even in the 'caste-free' 1951 census because of reference to 'traditional' caste occupations in tabulating an individual's economic activity.

23. Census of India, 1881, Madras, vol. 1 (Madras, 1883), p. 102.

24. Census of India, 1901, vol. 15, Madras, Part 1 (Madras, 1902), p. 126.

25. Ibid., p. 127.

26. Ibid., p. 3.

27. Census of Bombay, 1872, vol. 2 (Bombay, 1875), pp. 110-34.

28. The most comprehensive collection of these volumes I located was in the British Museum, c.f. F.B. Campbell, ed., *Index-Catalogue of Indian Official Publications in the Library, British Museum* (London, 1900), for nineteenth-century examples.

29. Frank F. Conlon, *A Caste in a Changing World: The Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmans, 1700–1935* (Berkeley and New Delhi, 1977).

30. Frank F. Conlon, 'Caste by Association: The Gauda Sarasvata Brahmana Unification Movement', *Journal of Asian Studies* 33 (May, 1974), pp. 351-65.

31. H. Shankar Rau, *The Chitrapur Saraswat Directory, 1933* (Bombay, 1933).

Chapter 11

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1. Clifford Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System', in Michael Banton, ed., *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London, 1966), p. 1 3 .

2. Amiya Charan Banerji, 'Brahmananda Keshub Chandra Sen', in Atul- chandra Gupta, ed., *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance* (Calcutta, 1958), pp. 79-80.

3. Kishori Chand Mitter as quoted in Lokanath Ghose, *The Modern History of Chiefs, Rajas, Zamindars of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1881), pt 1, p. 112.

4. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Towards Freedom* (New York, 1941), p. 353.

5. As quoted in L.S.S. O'Malley, 'General Survey', in L.S.S. O'Malley, ed., *Modern India and the West* (New York, 1941), p. 788.

6. My view of the Bengal Renaissance has been shaped by the work of David Kopf, particularly his *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), and his unpublished paper, 'The Idea of Renaissance in Indian

Historical Thought: A Study on the Historiography of Bengal'; and on the work of Warren Gunderson, 'The World of the Babu: Rajendralal Mitra and Cultural Change in Modern India', Ph.D. dissertation (University of Chicago, 1970), and 'The Self Image and World View of the Bengali Intelligentsia as Found in the Writings of the Mid-Nineteenth Century, 1830-1870', in Edward Dimock, ed., *Bengal Literature and History* (Michigan State University, Asian Studies Center Occasional Papers, 1967), pp. 127-77.

7. Stanley Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale: Revolution and Reform in the Making of Modern India* (Berkeley, 1962), pp. 67-8; Victor Barnouw, 'The Changing Character of a Hindu Festival', *American Anthropologist* (1954), vol. 56, pp. 74-86.

8. T.W. Clark, 'The Role of Bankim Chandra in the Development of Nationalism', in C.H. Philips, ed., *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon* (London, 1961), pp. 429-47; Rachel R. van Meter, 'Bankimchandra's View of the Role of Bengal in Indian Civilization', unpublished paper presented at the Second Annual Bengali Conference: University of Missouri, 14 May 1966.

9. V. Savarkar, *First War of Indian Independence*.

10. See reference to Marriott's article in *Old Societies and New States* and Wallerstein's article in *Colonial Situation*. Also Joseph Levenson's books and Martin Silverman's thesis.

11. See Minoo Adenwalla, 'Hindu Concepts and the *Gita* in Early Nationalist Thought' in Robert K. Sakai, ed., *Studies on Asia* (1961).

12. Notable exceptions to this generalization are Laurence Wylie's 'Life and Death of a Myth' in Melford Spiro, ed., *Context and Meaning in Cultural Anthropology* (New York, 1965), pp. 164-85; John William Ward's *Andrew Jackson: Symbolfor an Age* (New York, 1962); Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land, The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, Mass., 1950); and William R. Taylor, *Yankee and Cavalier* (New York, 1961). These works draw on popular literature, theatre, songs, cartoons, and other media to construct their account of the development of specific symbols important at various times in American history.

13. See David Kopf, Ellen Gumperz, 'English Education and Social Reform in Late Nineteenth Century Bombay', *Journal of Asian Studies* (May, 1966), vol. xxv, pp.

453-70; the research of Irene Gilbert on the Indian Educational Service and of David Lelyveld on Aligarh College.

14. See Gunderson.

15. Ellen Gumperz, 'The Modernizing of Communication: Vernacular Publishing in Nineteenth Century Maharashtra', *Asian Survey* (July 1968), vol. viii, pp. 589-606; and 'The Growth of Regional Consciousness in Maharashtra', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (1968), vol. v.

16. Jyotirindra Das Gupta and John Gumperz, 'Language Communication and Control in North India', in Joshua Fisman *et al.,* eds, *Language Problems of Developing Nations* (New York, 1968), pp. 151-66.

17. Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition* (Chicago, 1967), pp. 251-93; J.D.M. Derrett, 'Sanskrit Legal Treatises Compiled at the Instance of the British', *Zeltschrift fur Verglei-chende Rechtswissenschaft* (1961), vol. lxii, pp. 203-36; Marc Galanter, 'The Aborted Restoration of "Indigenous" Law in India', unpublished paper, 1969.

18. G.S. Ghurye was the first to note the effect that asking questions about caste may have had in heightening caste feelings. See G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India* (New York, 1932), pp. 156-8; also see M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966), pp. 94-100; and Imitiaz Ahmed, 'The Backward Castes Movement', unpublished paper, 1968.

19. Verelst's plans for revenue administration and his instructions are summarized in Nandalal Chatterji, *Verelst's Rule in India* (Allahabad: The Indian Press, 1939), pp. 238-60; W.K. Firminger, *Historical Introduction to the Bengal Portion of the Fifth Report,* Indian Studies Past and Present (Calcutta, 1962; orig. publ. 1917), pp. 186-96. The instructions are printed in full in Henry Verelst, *A View of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the English Government in Bengal* (London, 1772), appendix, pp. 224-39.

20. Clements R. Markham, *A Memoir on the Indian Surveys* (London, W.H. Allen and Co., 2nd edn 1878), p. 377; S.B. Chaudhuri, *History of the Gazetteers of India* (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, Government of India, 1964), pp. 25-6.

21. *Survey of India, Historical Records of the Survey of India*, collected and compiled by Col. R.H. Phillimore, 4 vols, New Delhi, 1945; Charles E.D. Black, *A Memoir on the Indian Surveys 1875–1890* (London, 1891).

22. These reports are found in the India Office Library, Home Miscellaneous Series, vols 775 and 776.

23. For examples see M. Elphinstone, *Report on the Territories Conquered from the Paishwa* (Calcutta, 1821, 2nd edn); Sir John Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India,* 2 vols (London, 1823); Lt. Col. A. Walker, 'Reports on the Resources of the (Ceded) Districts in the Province of Gujarat 1804-1806', *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government,* N.S., no. 39, pt 1, 1856.

24. See appendix 14, vol. II, Malcolm's *Memoir.*

25. Durgaprasad Bhattacharya and Bibhavati Bhattacharya have collected and published all printed estimates for the population of India in the period 1820-30, as well as some district and town censuses. They have also tried to summarize the methods used in obtaining these estimates. For their discussion of Hamilton, see Census of India, 1961, *Report on the Population Estimates of India 1820–1830,* vol. 29, p. 5. The Bhatta- charyas have projected eight volumes on the population estimates of India between the eighteenth century and 1872.

26. 'A Return of the Population of the British Territories in India . . .', appendix 42, first appendix to the *Third Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons,* 17 Feb. to 6 Oct. 1831, pp. 328-35.

27. Mountstuart Elphinstone, *The History of India* (London, 1857, 4th edn; orig. publ. 1841).

28. George, Viscount Valentia, *Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, and the Red Sea, Abyssinia, and Egypt in the Years 1802–1803, and 1806* (London, 1809), vol. I, appendix 1, pp. 461-5.

29. See H.E. Fame, *Five Years in India* (London, 1842), vol. I, p. 46; Robert B. Minturn, *From New York to Delhi* (New York, 1858), p. 136.

30. James Prinsep, 'Census of the Population of the City of Banaras', *Asiatic Researches* (1832), vol. xvii, pp. 470-98, reprinted in Bhattacharya and

Bhattacharya. The original manuscript of the census can be found in the Allahabad Central Record Office, Banaras Commission Office, Proceedings of the Committee for Local Improvement, basta 96, vol. 180; also see Prinsep's *Memoir* and James Prinsep, *Benares Illustrated in a Series of Drawings* (Calcutta, 1830).

31. H.R. Nevill, *Benares: A Gazetteer,* District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (Lucknow, 1922), vol. xxvi, p. 235.

32. William Tennant, *Indian Recreation; Consisting Chiefly of Structures on the Domestic and the Rural Economy of the Mahomedans and Hindoos* (London, 1804, 2nd edn), vol. ii, p. 178.

33. Ibid., p. 180.

34. Reginald Heber, *Narrative of Journey Through the Upper Provinces of India* (Philadelphia, 1828), vol. 1, pp. 276-7.

35. William Buyers, *Recollections of Northern India* (London, 1848), p. 257.

36. A. Shakespear, *Memoir on the Statistics of the Northwestern Provinces of the Bengal Presidency* (Calcutta, 1848), p. 2.

37. See Daniel and Alice Thorner, 'De-Industrialisation in India 1881-1931', 'Agrarian Revolution by Census Redefinition' and 'Economic Concepts in the Census ofIndia 1951' in *Land and Labor in India* (London, 1962) for a discussion of the categories dealing with labour and occupation in the census of India.

38. Shakespear, p. 8.

39. See, for example, the discussion of F.R. Davidson, Collector of Sharanpur, in Shakespear, p. 43.

40. See the discussion of C. Wingfield, Deputy Collector of Muzaffarnagar in Shakespear, p. 47.

41. Shakespear, p. 31.

42. C.J. Christian, *Report on the Census of the North-West Provinces of the Bengal Presidency taken on the First of January, 1853* (Calcutta, 1854), pp. 1–4.

43. Ibid., p. 10.

44. Ibid., p. 13.

45. Ibid., pp. 414-18.

46. Bhattacharya and Bhattacharya, pp. 285-94.

47. The census of India for 1871-2 was subjected to a very careful and detailed criticism by Henry Waterfield of the Statistics and Commerce Department of the Secretary of State for India Office, *Memorandum on the Census of British India 1871–72* (London, 1875), cmd. 1349.

48. Quoted from Waterfield's memo, p. 41.

49. H. Beverly, *Report on the Census of Bengal 1872,* pt 1, pp. 4-5.

50. E.A. Gait, *Report on the Census of Bengal 1901: Administrative Volume* (Calcutta, 1902), pp. 1-2.

51. Bourdillon to Sec. Gov., Bengal Financial Dept., *Proceedings of the Lt. Gov. of Bengal:* Financial Dept. Branch Statistics Head Census, March 1881, no. 1764C, 22 March 1881, India Office Library.

52. G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India* (New York, 1932), p. 158.

53. M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966), p. 95.

54. Srinivas, p. 100.

55. Beverly, p. 1.

56. Waterfield, p. 20.

57. For an example of instructions, see B. Robertson, *The Central Provinces and Feudatories, Census of India 1891,* vol. xi, pt 1, Report, appendix A.

58. Gait, *Administrative Volume, Census of Bengal, 1901,* appendix vii, pp. xxxviii-1.

59. *Proceedings of the Lt. Governor of Bengal,* Financial Dept., Branch Statistics, Head Census, July 1881. Circular no. 5, May 1881, India Office Library.

60. Ibid., Bourdillon to Sec. Govt. Bengal Financial Dept. #255i C, 17 June, 1881; and Kirsch to Bourdillon, #496, 18 July 1881.

61. Rajendra Lal Mitra, letter of 12 July 1881 in India Office Library.

62. H.H. Risley, India Office Library, European Manuscripts Euro. 101, Circular no. 1, 24 July 1886.

63. Ibid., Sen to Risley, 30 August 1886.

64. Risley, p. i.

65. Ibid., p. ii.

66. Deputy Commissioner Office Jullundur Census 'Classification of Mahtons in the Census of 1911', English File 5/viii.

67. Khondkar Fuzl-i-Rubbee (Fazl-i-Rabb), *The Origin of the Musalmans of Bengal, Being a Translation of Hagigate Musalman i Bengalah* (Calcutta, 1895).

68. Ibid., p. 64.

69. Ibid., p. 65.

70. India Census Commissioner, *Census of India,* vol. xvii, 1931.

Chapter 12

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1. This paper has been discussed with David Arnold, Ishita Banerjee, Crispin Bates, Partha Chatterjee, Veena Das, Leela Dube, S.C. Dube, David Ludden, Javed Majeed, Gyan Pandey, Sumit Sarkar, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam. The arguments and material it embodies have been presented in different forms at Delhi,

Cambridge, New York, Santa Cruz, and Calcutta. The final version has benefited from detailed comments by Shahid Amin, Gautam Bhadra, David Hardiman and Rosalind O'Hanlon.

2. The paper is a part of a larger project on religion, community, law, and forms of resistance in Chhattisgarh in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; it represents an intermediate step in my research.

3. I borrow the category of mythic tradition from Gananath Obeyesekere, extending it in a somewhat different way for Satnampanth. Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini* (Chicago, 1983).

4. C.U. Wills, 'The Territorial System of the Rajput Kingdoms of Mediaeval Chhattisgarh', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal,* N.S. 15 (1919), pp. 197-262; P.F. McEldowney, 'Colonial Administration and Social Development in the C.P 1861-1921', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University ofVirginia (Microfilm, Ann Arbor, 1981), pp. 486-90.

5. Patrick vans Agnew, *A Report on the Subah or Province of Chhattisgarh written in 1820* (Nagpur, 1915); Richard Jenkins, *A Report on the Territories of the Raja of Nagpur 1827* (Nagpur, 1866); Bhagwan Singh Thakur, 'Chhattisgarh Mein Bhonsla Rajya', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Ravi Shankar University (Raipur, 1974).

6. Agnew, pp. 20-3, 27-8, 40-5.

7. Ibid., pp. 4-5, 35-6; see also the comments of the chief commissioner in J.F.K. Hewitt, *Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of Raepore District, Central Provinces* (Nagpur, 1896).

8. *Report on the Census of C.P. taken on 5 November 1866* (Nagpur, 1867); Parshotum Das, *Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of Bilaspur District, 1886 to 1890* (Nagpur, 1892); E.R.K. Blenkinsop, *Report on the Land Revenue Settlement ofDurg Tehsil in the Raipur District 1896 to 1902* (Nagpur, 1903); H.E. Hemingway, *Final Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Raipur District* (Nagpur, 1972); and P.F. McEldowney.

9. See, for instance, J.W. Chisholm, *Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Bilaspore District* (Nagpur, 1869), p. 47. The writings of other administrators have tended to follow Chisholm's chronology. B.L. Pargania states that the 'movement'

was founded in 1832. B.L. Pargania, The Satnami Movement', *Journal of Social Research, 10,* no. 1 (Ranchi, 1967), p. 1.

10. There have been several forceful reminders about the error of culling out elements for a linear and chronological 'history' from myth. See Juan M. Ossio, 'Myth and History: The Seventeenth Century Chronicle of Guaman Poma de Ayala', in Ravindra K. Jain (ed.), *Text and Context: The Social Anthropology of Tradition* (Philadelphia, 1977); Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali* (Princeton, 1980); and Obeyesekere, *Pattini.*

11. These include records in the Foreign Political Series (National Archives of India, New Delhi), the Nagpur Residency Records, the Bhonsla Vernacular Records, the Nagpur Residency and Secretariat Records (Madhya Pradesh Record Office, Nagpur), and the Board's Collection (India Office Library, London).

12. Agnew; and Jenkins. Agnew was the Superintendent at Chhattisgarh; Jenkins was the Resident at Nagpur.

13. I am summing up the arguments developed at length in my 'Social History of Satnamis of Chhattisgarh', unpublished M.Phil. dissertation (University of Delhi, 1988), pp. 8-21.

14. *Lakhabata* refers to the practice of the periodic redistribution of land. Chhattisgarh is marked by a considerable diversity of soils. The variety of lands within the village used to be constituted into equally valued plots: the village headman had a certain share in each of these blocks and the rest was distributed among the other well-off cultivators within the village. The institution of lakhabata meant that the blocks of land within the village were periodically redistributed to ensure that members of the village got a share of both poor and good land. It was carried out to accommodate new settlers. The practice also came into play when a village changed hands and a new headman entered the fray. This happened fairly often under *subah* administration. Lakhabata had a specific consequence: it led to the increased marginalization of 'poor and cattleless Ryots', which included a large number of Chamars, whose lands were claimed by well-off cultivators. *Memo on the Connection between Landlord and Tenant in the Chhattisgarh Division,* revenue department file no. 5 (after) 1869 (supplementary index), NRSR, MPRO, Nagpur.

15. We have been reminded that the notion of a division among superordinates is, often, critical for the development of subaltern resistance. See, for instance, Sumit Sarkar, 'The Conditions and Nature of Subaltern Militancy: Bengal from Swadeshi to Non-Co-operation (1905-22)', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies III* (Delhi, 1984).

16. Agnew, pp. 43-4.

17. I have in mind the work of Rosalind O'Hanlon and Mark Juergensmeyer. The interaction of religion and social vision has been a major theme in these studies. 'The theme has been played out in several variations. A central statement of it is that the lower castes perceive their oppression as stemming from a religious concept, untouchability, as from political circumstances. A major variant on the theme is the lower-caste perception that the fundamental divisions in society are religious.' Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982), p. 269. Also see Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology* (Cambridge, 1985), and for the conduct of resistance in the idiom of religion, David Hardiman, *The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India* (Delhi, 1987).

18. See, for instance, Owen M. Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability* (New York, 1969); Bernard S. Cohn, 'The Changing Status of a Depressed Caste' and The Changing Traditions of a Low Caste', *An Anthropologist among Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi, 1987).

19. I wish to thank Kapil Kumar for informing me about the writings on the Satnamis in the Baba Ramchandra Papers, Manuscript Section, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), New Delhi.

20. I shall discuss the ambiguous and contradictory nature, trajectory, and sequences of the Satnami Mahasabha initiative in a chapter of my forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation.

21. See Kapil Kumar, *Peasants in Revolt: Tenants, Landlords, Congress and the Raj in Oudh 1886–1922* (Delhi, 1984) and 'The Use of Ramcharitmanas as a Radical Text: Baba Ramchandra in Oudh 1920-50', *Occasional Papers in History and Society No. IV*(NMML, New Delhi); Gyanendra Pandey, 'Peasant Revolt in Indian Nationalism: The Peasant Movement in Awadh 1919-22', in Ranajit Guha (ed.),

Subaltern Studies I: Essays on South Asian History and Society (Delhi, 1982); M.H. Siddiqi, *Agrarian Unrest in North India: The United Provinces 1918–22* (New Delhi, 1978).

22. The specific term used by Ramchandra was *'poonjipatiyon ki Congress'*—a Congress of capitalists. Equally, it is interesting that the 1925 session of the Congress did not go off well in Ramchandra's perception: his discussions with Jawaharlal Nehru and Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi failed; *kisans* from Bihar and Arjunlal from Ajmer were insulted; finally, there is a reference to kisans not being allowed to enter the arena of meetings, which resulted in a battle—'yudh'—that ended in a victory for the kisans. Baba Ramchandra Papers, First Instalment, III, Speeches and Writings, file no. 2A, Manuscript Section, NMML, New Delhi.

23. The first substantial part of the *Vanshavali* is in the files of speeches and writings, file no. 2A; I came across the second part of the *Vanshavali* in file no. 2B (Loose Papers from Ramchandra's Notebooks). The *Vanshavali* is incomplete; the last few pages are missing. Baba Ramchandra Papers, First Instalment, Manuscript Section, NMML, New Delhi.

24. The earliest account of the Satnamis was in the *Report of Ethnological Committee 1866–67.* This was soon followed by Settlement Reports for Bilaspur and Raipur districts. J.W. Chisholm; J.F.K. Hewitt, *Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Raepore District* (Nagpur, 1896). The later writings, including Gazetteers, tended to repeat the earlier narratives about the customs of the Satnamis. For other interesting information, see Russell and Hiralal, *The Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces* (London, 1916) and *C.P Ethnographic Survey,* Draft Articles on Hindustani Caste, First Series (Nagpur, 1914). Census volumes provide supplementary information; see for instance T. Drysdale, *Central Provinces Report on the Census of 1881* (Bombay, 1882); B. Robertson, *Central Provinces Report on the Census of 1891* (Calcutta, 1893). The records of the American Evangelical Mission are interesting for rituals, beliefs, and practices of the Satnamis. I have not used these papers, a number of which are in German. (Records of the American Evangelical Mission, Eden Archives and Library, Webster Groves, Missouri.)

25. Renato Rosaldo's warning comes to us from his comments on Le Roy Ladurie's use of ethnographic methods in *Montaillou.* I recognize that there is a

difference between Fournier's 'inquisitorial voice' and Baba Ramchandra's attempt to write the *Vanshavali*. Yet there remains Rosaldo's larger point about the historian 'deploying a tactic made familiar by Michel Foucault', whereby 'the narrator invokes the will to truth to suppress the documents' equally present will to power' to liberate the document from the historical context and the politics of domination that produced it: the 'historian's document is rhetorically treated as if it were the product of a disinterested science'. Renato Rosaldo, 'From the Door of his Tent: The Fieldworker and the Inquisitor', in James Clifford and George Marcus (eds), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (California, 1986), p. 81.

26. See Juan M. Ossio, 'Myth and History: The Seventeenth Century Chronicle of Guaman Poma de Ayala', in Ravindra Jain (ed.), *Text and Context: The Social Anthropology of Tradition* (Philadelphia, 1977).

27. The entire body of Baba Ramchandra's writings on the Satnamis, in fact, had greater polish and were often more didactic than the *Vanshavali.* Santdas (Baba Ramchandra), *Satnam Sagar* (Raipur, 1929).

28. I carried out fieldwork among the Satnamis between November 1989 and April 1990. It is also necessary to point out that Baba Ramchandra had carried away the manuscript of the *Vanshavali* to Awadh; he did not 'gift' the Satnamis with myths which then became a part of their oral tradition.

29. The Satnami mythic tradition is a conceptual entity: it is a historiographical blueprint which helps me to structure Satnami myths and rituals and 'to reconstitute by an operation of logical reconstruction which has nothing to do with an act of empathic projection', the cultural logic of Satnampanth. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 114; on the use of a conceptual entity constructed out of empirical data as a guide for historical analysis, see Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali* (Princeton, 1980).

30. Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', cited in Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (North Carolina, 1980), p. vii.

31. I borrow the term 'official conceptions' from Gramsci: 'Folklore should instead be studied as a conception of the world and life implicit to a large extent in determinate (in time and space) strata of society and in opposition (also for the most part implicit, mechanical or objective) to "official" conceptions of the world (or in a broader sense, the conceptions of the cultured parts of historically determinate societies) . . .' Antonio Gramsci, 'Observations on Folklore: Giovanni Crocionni', *Selections from Cultural Writings* (London, 1985).

32. Anthony Cohen has argued that it is not very helpful to conceive of a community in morphological terms: a community is a symbolic construct: the boundary of the community—its critical defining element—is constituted through symbols. Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London, 1985).

33. Captain Elliot, deputy commissioner, Raipur, had also reported that a plough of four bullocks is called a 'Kutcha Naugar' and forms the standard on which calculations are made—a plough of eight bullocks is called a 'Pukka Naugar' and double the former also exists but only in name and plough of two bullocks is recognised. From Captain Elliot, deputy commissioner, Raipur, to Major Elliot, commissioner of Nagpur, 29 October 1859. *Existing state of tenures and mode of assessment in Chhattisgarh previous to the year 1233 F,* revenue department, file no. 14 of 1859, MPRO, Nagpur.

34. I would like to make three points about the term *chaitanya swarup*. First, the term literally refers to an enlightened form. Second, in the Hindu textual tradition this enlightened form is seen in opposition to a corporeal physical form; this is obviously not the meaning the term has within the Satnami mythic tradition, since it seems to suggest a particular form of physical being. Third, chaitanya swarup may have entered the *Vanshavali* as an imposition of Baba Ramchandra but, situated within the multiple relations of a new context, the category pressed new associations.

35. *Shwetpurush* is in literal terms a white person: white suggests the qualities of purity and truth. Evangelical missionaries seized upon this reference to shwet purush and argued that Ghasidas had received his inspiration from a white Christian missionary. See, for instance, *Satnampanth Darshak,* Records of American Evangelical Mission, Eden Archives and Library, St Louis, Missouri.

36. The Satnamis make two claims at the same time: they are the original inhabitants of Chhattisgarh; their ancestors had come from the north many hundred years ago.

37. I borrow the category of the barrier from Obeyesekere. Gananath Obeyesekere, *Pattini,* pp. 309-11.

38. The custom among the Satnamis is not to cremate but to bury their dead.

39. Obeyesekere discusses this classic pattern—trials, ordeals, the symbolism of the barrier, and the final incorporation of a deity into an existent pantheon and mythic tradition—in his chapter on 'Mythic Stratigraphy', in *Pattini*.

40. This is also, of course, what distinguishes the Satnami mythic tradition from the classic pattern discussed by Obeyesekere, *Pattini*.

41. Interview with Vijay Guru, Bhopal, June 1985.

42. I am extending an argument of Michael Denning. I also have in mind Roland Barthes: 'To understand a narrative is not merely to follow the unfolding of the story, it is also to recognize its construction in "storeys", to project the horizontal concatenations of the narrative thread onto an implicitly vertical axis; to read (to listen to) a narrative is not merely to move from one word to the next, it is also to move from one level to the next, meaning is not "at the end" of the narrative, it runs accross it.' Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working Class Culture in America* (London, 1987); Roland Barthes, 'Introduction to Structural Analysis of Narratives', *Image-Music-Text* (New York, 1977), p. 87.

43. Obeyesekere has pointed out the parallel between the symbolism of the barrier in the incorporation of a new deity into a mythic tradition and a rite of initiation. I intend to explore this further. Obeyesekere, *Pattini*, pp. 310-11. On the figure of the 'renouncer', see Louis Dumont, 'World Renunciation in Indian Religion', *Contributions to Indian Sociology,* 9, 1960.

44. The examples are taken from the *Vanshavali* and the *C.P. Ethnographic Survey*, Draft Articles on Hindustani Castes, First Series (Nagpur, 1914).

45. See Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance,* pp. 8-9 and passim.

46. The account of Satnami rituals and practices that follows is based on the writings of colonial administrators and on interviews. I mention the other sources that I have used separately.

47. It was the middle and upper castes—Rauts, Telis, Thakurs, and Brah- mins—who could be initiated into Satnampanth. According to a Satnami myth, a large number of Telis—oil pressers—became Satnamis.

48. From Major F.C. Stewart, D.S.P. Raepore, to Captain H. Ingard, deputy commissioner, Raepore, July 1870, no. 962 of 1870, General Department Compilation, no. 412 of 1872, *Famine of1868–69,* MPRO, Nagpur.

49. See, for instance, Lawrence Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy* (Columbia, 1975), and Edward Harper, 'Ritual Pollution as an Integrator of Caste and Religion', *Journal of Asian Studies,* vol. XXIII, June 1964.

50. Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications* (London, 1970).

51. Michael Moffat, *An Untouchable Community in South India: Structure and Consensus* (Princeton, 1979).

52. At the same time, as I shall argue, the construct of a culturally and ritually significant dominant caste was another defining axis of the hegemonic symbolic order. Equally, the symbols, signs, and metaphors of colonial power also constituted a dominant and hegemonic presence in the cultural world of Chhattisgarh.

53. See Andrew Turton, 'Limits of Ideological Domination and the Formation of Social Consciousness', *Senri Ethnological Studies,* 13, 1984; Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, 1984) and 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London, 1980); E.P. Thompson, 'Eighteenth Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?', *Social History,* vol. 3, no. 2, May 1978.

54. For the notion of differential appropriation of symbols within popular culture, see Roger Chartier, 'Culture as Appropriation: Popular Cultural Uses in Early

Modern France', in Steven Kaplan (ed.), *Understanding Popular Culture* (Mouton, 1988).

55. Dan Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 122.

56. See, for instance, Edward Harper, 'Ritual Pollution as an Integrator of Caste', *Journal of Asian Studies,* vol. XXIII, June 1964; and, particularly, Lawrence Babb, *Divine Hierarchy*.

57. For a description of the organizational hierarchy within Satnampanth, see K.C. Dubey, *Kosa: A Village Survey,* Census of India 1961, vol. VIII, Madhya Pradesh, part VI, Village Survey Monographs No. 9. For a description of the satnami rite of initiation, *Satlok*, which cannot, however, be counted on for accuracy, see the account of *tahsildar* Durga Prasad Pandey, cited in Rusell and Hiralal, *Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces of India* (London, 1916).

58. On the Kabirpanth in Chhattisgarh, see *C.P. Ethnographic Survey,* XVII, Draft Articles on Hindustani Castes, 1st Series (Nagpur, 1914), pp. 25-39.

59. Colonial administrators made a great deal of this continuity since it helped them situate Satnampanth within a linear history of religion. The connections could, of course, have existed, but, given the paucity of sources, are difficult to establish. Moreover, there could also have been links between the Satnamis of Chhattisgarh and the Satnami movement of north India described by Irfan Habib in *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* (London, 1963), pp. 338-9, 342-4.

60. To the extent that there is a universality about such a process of symbolic construction, Satnampanth constituted a 'bricolage'. This concept of Levi-Strauss has been deployed by historians and anthropologists to describe processes of symbolic construction in varied historical contexts. See, Claude Levi Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London, 1966); Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* (Chicago, 1985); David Warren Sabean, *Power in the Blood* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 90-1; Sumit Sarkar, 'The Kalki Avatar of Bisrampur: A Village Scandal in Early Twentieth Century Bengal', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies VI: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi, 1989), p. 48.

61. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, 1977); Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance*.

62. For another discussion of the place of the body within the caste system, see Partha Chatterjee, 'Caste as Subaltern Consciousness', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies VI: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi, 1989), pp. 203-6.

63. I am, of course, reiterating my argument about the dual logic of the limits of, and the limits set by, the hegemonic symbolic order of the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution. Jean Comaroff has discussed similar issues in the context of Tshidi Zionist cult practice in *Body of Power.*

64. See Obeyesekere, *Pattini,* pp. 292-3.

65. The *Vanshavali* does not tell us anything more about the moneylender or the Gond raja.

66. The other two sacred dates, according to the *Vanshavali,* were *Bhad Aathon* and *Dashehra.*

67. Ranajit Guha has discussed modes of transport as symbols of upper-caste domination and their appropriation as an act of inversion. Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi, 1983), pp. 66-8.

68. Kapil Kumar has discussed how Baba Ramchandra himself addressed peasant meetings sitting on a cot tied up high between the branches of trees: the incident of Ghasidas perched on a tree could, then, have been an addition made either by Ramchandra or his Satnami informants after hearing about it from him. At the same time, the fact of Ghasidas' darshan, of the transmission of his authority through sight, has an important place within the myths of Satnampanth. Kapil Kumar, *Peasants in Revolt: Tenants, Landlords, Congress and the Raj in Oudh, 1886–1922* (Delhi, 1984), pp. 89-90.

69. The place of darshan of a guru, a two-way process that constitutes a spectacle, occupies a central place within the Bhakti and Sant traditions. For an interesting recent discussion of the transmission of a guru's authority through sight, see Lawrence Babb, *Redemptive Encounters: Three Modern Styles in the Hindu Tradition* (Delhi, 1987), pp. 78-9.

70. An encounter between different conceptions and notations of time is a critical event: delay can be used as a subaltern mode of resistance against the regimentation of time and work discipline. See, for instance, Michael Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (North Carolina, 1980); E.P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present,* 38, 1967.

71. On writing as a form of power in the colonial context, see, for instance, Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects* (Delhi, 1983); and Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power.*

72. Srinivas' concept of Sanskritization does not require introduction. M.N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (Oxford, 1962); *Social Change in Modern India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966). For an extension of the concept to Satnamis, see P.F. McEldowney, pp. 499-500.

73. The concept of Sanskritization has been used, debated, and criticized endlessly over the years. David Hardiman has engaged with and provided an effective recent critique of the category. My criticisms of the concept take up and carry forward Hardiman's arguments: 'Sanskritization' underestimates conflict generated by the appropriation of upper-caste symbols by low castes; the theory lacks a convincing historical dimension; and the way out of the impasse does lie in relating values to power. At the same time, my emphasis on the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution as a defining axis of the hegemonic symbolic order also stresses that such appropriation of upper-caste symbols tends to reproduce the significance of dominant meanings and functions within hegemonic limits. David Hardiman, *The Coming of the Devi* (Delhi, 1987), pp. 157-65.

74. See Veena Das, 'Subaltern as Perspective', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies VI: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi, 1989), pp. 318-19.

75. The long-drawn-out conflict between the upper castes and Satnamis over the issue of the sacred thread was an important aspect of the late nineteenth century in Chhattisgarh. We are lucky that we have a mythic representation of the conflict: official sources tell us little about it.

76. See Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1987); 'The Original Caste: Power, History and Hierarchy in South Asia', *Contributions to Indian Sociology,* vol. 23, no. l, January-June 1989, p. 61;

Gloria Goodwin Raheja, *The Poison in the Gift: Ritual Presentation and the Dominant Caste in a North Indian Village* (Chicago, 1988); 'Centrality, Mutuality and Hierarchy: Shifting Aspects of Inter-caste relationships in North India', *Contributions to Indian Sociology,* vol. 23, no. 1, January-June 1989, p. 8.

77. Interview with Kanhaiyalal Kosariya, Bhopal, 3-4 June 1987.

78. The gold ornaments and chair were, of course, signifiers of rank within the social order. I think this ties up with my argument about the importance of a culturally and ritually significant dominant caste as an axis of the hegemonic symbolic order.

79. My enquiries in the field have revealed that Balakdas too came back to this world; the person who had asked for his last rites to be performed was his younger brother and heir to the seat of the guru, Agardas. This is, in fact, a recurring pattern for the first three generations of Satnami gurus.

Chapter 13

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1. David Hall, 'Introduction', in *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to Nineteenth Century,* ed. Steven L .Kaplan (Berlin, 1984), p. 6.

2. Barry Reay, 'Popular Religion', in *Popular Culture in Seventeenth Century England,* ed. Barry Reay (London, 1988), p. 91.

3. Ibid., p. 111.

4. Natalie Z. Davis, 'Some Themes and Tasks in the Study of Popular Religion', in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion,* ed. C. Trinkaus and H.A. Oberman (Leiden, 1974), pp. 308-9, 313.

5. Roger Chartier, 'Culture as Appropriation: Popular Cultural Uses in Early Modern France', in *Understanding Popular Culture,* p. 235.

6. Ibid., p. 233.

7. H.H. Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* (London, 1891, rpntd Calcutta, 1981), vol. I, p. 189; *Census of India,* 1901, vol. VI, pt I, pp. 395-6, 459; vol. VIA, pt II, table XIII, p. 246; *Bengal District Gazetteers,* B Volume (Calcutta, 1933), for the districts of Bakarganj, Faridpur, Jessore and Khulna; Naresh Chandra Das, *Namasudra Sampraday O Bangladesh* (in Bengali; Calcutta, 1368 B.S.), p. l.

8. Gobinda Chandra Basak, *BangiyaJatimala* (in Bengali; 2 nd edn, Dacca, 1318 B.S.), p. 67; James Wise, *Notes on the Races, Castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal* (London, 1883), p. 257; H.H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes,* vol. I, pp. 183-5; Nihar Ranjan Ray, *Bangali Hindur Varnabhed* (in Bengali; Calcutta, 1352 B.S.), p. 104.

9. Jogindra Narayan Ray, *Jatitattva* (in Bengali; Calcutta, 1316 B.S.), p. 38; Jogeschandra Dasgupta, *Jatibikash ba Chudamanitattva* (in Bengali; Rangpur, 1319 B.S.), p. 67; Asutosh Mukhopadhyay, *Jati-bijnan* (in Bengali; Jaynagar, 24-Parganas, 1321 B.S.), p. 82; Pitambar Sarkar, *Jati-Bikas* (in Bengali; Calcutta, 1910), pp. 48, 75-6, 82-3.

10. *Brihaddharmapuranam,* ed. H.P Shastri, Bibliotheca Indica, Asiatic Society of Bengal (Calcutta, 1888), p. 578; *Brahmavaivarttapuranam*, ed. Panchanan Tarkaratna (Calcutta, 1391 B.S.), pp. 22, 25-7.

11. Bani Chakraborti, *Samaj Sanskarak Raghunandan* (2 nd revised edn, Calcutta, 1970), pp. 33, 256-1.

12. Mukundaram, *Chandimangala,* ed. Sukumar Sen, Sahitya Academy (New Delhi, 1975), p. 81; also see, Bharatchandra, *Annadamangala,* in *Bharatchandra Granthabali,* ed. Brojendranath Bandyopadhyay and Sajani Kanta Das, Bangiya Sahitya Parishat (3 rd edn, Calcutta, 1369 B. S.), p. 171.

13. Report (of the enquiry) by H.E. Stapleton, D.P.I., Bengal, to Secretary, Government of Bengal, Education Department, 22 March 1929, Government of Bengal, Appointment Department Proceedings, File No. 5M-114 of 1928, February 1930, Proceedings nos. 7-20, West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta (hereafter WBSA).

14. Gobinda Chandra Basak, *Bangiya Jatimala,* pt I (in Bengali; Mymen- singh, 1901), pp. 108, 113-14.

15. See various reports in 'Ethnographical Papers: Social Status of Castes', vol. VI, Mss.Eur.E.101, India Office Library, London (hereafter IOL), pp. 59-60, 103, 108, 117, 125, 128, 130, 133, 136ff.

16. For anecdotal evidence of such ambivalent behaviour, see Madhusudan Sarkar, 'Sparshadosh Prathar Rakshashi Murti', *Nabyabharat,* 12:12, Chaitra 1301 b.s., pp. 641-3; Haridas Palit, *Bangiya Patit Jatir Karmee* (in Bengali; Calcutta, 1322 b.s.), pp. 2-3; Sarat Kumar Ray, *Mahatma Aswini Kumar* (in Bengali; Calcutta, 1333 b.s.), pp. 97-8.

17. For some examples of this type of literature, see note 9.

18. Lalmohan Vidyanidhi, *Sambandhanirnaya* (in Bengali; Calcutta, n.d.), p. 133.

19. *Census oflndia,* 1901, vol. VIA, pt II, pp. 480-1; *Census of India,* 1911, vol. V, pt II, pp. 370-3; for further details, see Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, 'Social Protest or Politics of Backwardness?—The Namasudra Movement in Bengal, 1872-1911', in *Dissent and Consensus: Social Protest in Pre-Industrial Societies,* ed. Basudeb Chattopadhyay, Hari S. Vasudevan and Rajat K. Ray (Calcutta, 1989), pp. 175-81.

20. For details on reclamation, see Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, 'Social Protest', pp. 176-7.

21. For different meanings, see H.H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes,* vol. I, p. 183, note 3; and Naresh Chandra Das, *Namasudra Sampraday,* p. 68.

22. Naresh Chandra Das, *Namasudra Sampraday,* p. 38.

23. James Wise, *Notes on the Races,* pp. 194, 256.

24. 'Ethnographical Papers: Social Status of Castes', vol. VI, Mss. Eur.E. 101, IOL, p. 128.

25. 'Caste File No. III', Mss.Eur.D.191, IOL, pp. 100, 104, 115.

26. Jogeschandra Pal, 'Banglar Hindu', *Bangabani,* 5 (2nd Half): 4, Agrahayan 1333 b.s., pp. 397-8; also see Rohini Kumar Sen, *Bakla* (in Bengali; Barisal, 1915),

p. 290.

27. C.S. Mead, *The Namasudras and Other Addresses* (Adelaide, 1911), p. 76; for other details, see H. Beveridge, *The District of Bakarganj: Its History and Statistics* (London, 1876), pp. 260-5.

28. Edward C. Dimock, Jr., *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaishnava Sahajiya Cult of Bengal* (Chicago & London, 1966), pp. 71-2, 77.

29. 'Hitesranjan Sanyal, *Social Mobility in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1981), pp. 29, 58-9; 'Trends of Change in the Bhakti Movement in Bengal', Occasional Paper No. 76, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1985.

30. Edward C. Dimock, Jr., *The Place of the Hidden Moon,* pp. 68-71, 78-81.

31. Ramakanta Chakraborti, *Vaishnavism in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1985), pp. 321-2, 333.

32. Quoted in Madhusudan Tattwabachaspati, *Gaudiya Vaishnava Itihas* (in Bengali; Hooghli, 1333 b.s.), p. 329.

33. Ramakanta Chakraborti, *Vaishnavism in Bengal*, pp. 90, 322.

34. Edward C. Dimock, Jr., *The Place of the Hidden Moon,* pp. 70-1, 82-3.

35. Ramakanta Chakraborti, *Vaishnavism in Bengal*, pp. 321, 325, 328-35, 339-40; J.N. Bhattacharya, *Hindu Castes and Sects* (2 nd edn, Calcutta, 1968), pp. 160, 185-6, 195, 200-12, 280, 367-9.

36. H.H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes*, vol. I, p. 187.

37. H. Beveridge, *The District of Bakarganj,* pp. 260-5.

38. Jogendranath Gupta, *BikrampurerItihas* (in Bengali; Calcutta, 1316 B.S.), pp. 370-1.

39. Jasimuddin, *Murshida Gaan* (in Bengali; Bangla Academy, Dacca, 1977), pp. 36-42, 259, 262.

40. Madhusudan Tattwabachaspati, *Gaudiya Vaishnava Itihas,* pp. 399, 403-5.

41. For details of this movement, see Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, 'Social Protest', pp. 183-4.

42. Memo from District Superintendent of Police to Magistrate of Faridpur, 18 March 1873, Government of Bengal, Judicial Department Proceedings, March 1873, no. 179, WBSA.

43. Paramananda Haldar, *MatuaDharmaDarshan* (in Bengali; Thakurnagar, 1393 b.s.), p. 47; Nityananda Haldar, *Srihari Darshan* (in Bengali; Thakurnagar, 1392 b.s.), p. 54.

44. *Jibe daya name ruchi manushete nishtha, Iha chhada ar jato sab kriya bhrashto.* Tarak Chandra Sarkar, *Sri Sri Harileelamrita* (in Bengali; Faridpur, 1323 b.s.), p. 23.

45. *Matua Dharma Darshan,* pp. 74-5, 78-9.

46. Nityananda Haldar, *Matua Dharma Ki-O-Keno* (in Bengali; Thakur- nagar, 1394 b.s.), pp. 1-4, 6-7; *Harileelamrita,* p. 67; *Matua Dharma Darshan.* pp. 85-6.

47. *Harileelamrita,* p. 107; *Matua Dharma Darshan,* pp. 157-8, 163.

48. Nityananda Haldar, *Matua Dharma-Tattwa-Sar* (in Bengali; Thakur- nagar, 1393 B.S.), p. 90; *Srihari Darshan*, p. 54.

49. *Matua Dharma Ki-O-Keno*, p. 7.

50. *Kshatragarba nashta kari Samata anite Hari Brahman Chandal sabe samajog dey. '* Mahananda Haldar, *Sri Sri Guruchand-charit* (in Bengali; Calcutta, 1943), p. 72.

51. Ibid., pp. 203, 360.

52. *Srihari Darshan,* pp. 112-13.

53. Tarak Chandra Sarkar, *Sri Sri Mahasamkirtan* (in Bengali; 9 th edn, Thakurnagar, 1394 B.S.), p. 69.

54. Ibid., p. 107.

55. Ibid., p. 31.

56. *Matua Dharma Darshan,* pp. 158-9.

57. *Guruchand-charit*, p. 203.

58. Chintaharan Chattopadhyay, *Brahman* (in Bengali; Faridpur, 1317 B.S.), pp. 70-1.

59. Madhusudan Tattwabachaspati. *Gaudiya Vaishnava Itihas,* pp. 196-7.

60. Ramakanta Chakraborti, *Vaishnavism in Bengal,* pp. 81-2, 321.

61. *Harileelamrita,* pp. 24, 73.

62. *Guruchand-charit*, p. 14.

63. *Matua Dharma-Tattwa-Sar,* p. 33.

64. a) Kaj ki amar mantrabije
Harichand-chhabi rabir kirane uthalilo madhu hritsaroje. Mahasamkirtan, p. 59.
b) Gururupe Hari tumi, ese sarnsare,
Tumi Hari haye Hari bole, nam dila sakalare.
Matua Sangeet, pt I, compiled by Matua Mahasangha, (in Bengali; 6 th edn, Thakurnagar, 1393 B.S.), p. 65.
c) *Java jagatbandhu Guruchandrahe,*
Namasudra Kuloddharan kripasindhe.
Matua Sangeet, p. 11.

65. *Guruchand-charit,* p. 23.

66. Ibid., p. 315.

67. Ibid., pp. 23, 69.

68. Ibid., p. 573; also, ' *Tuliya namer dheu prem plabanete/Dhuye muchhe niba sab namplabanete*', *Harileelamrita,* p. 73.

69. For examples, see note 64.

70. Hitesranjan Sanyal, *BanglaKirtanerItihas* (in Bengali; Calcutta, 1989), pp. 20-30, 38-46, 240-6.

71. *Mahasamkirtan*, p. 2.

72. *Matua Sangeet*, p. 10.

73. Ibid., p. 18.

74. Ibid., p. 12.

75. Ibid., p. 20.

76. Ibid., p. 134.

77. Hitesranjan Sanyal, *Bangla Kirtaner Itihas,* p. 43.

78. *Srihari Darshan*, pp. 38-9.

79. *Harileelamrita,* pp. 24, 73.

80. *Guruchand-charit*, p. 165.

81. *Srihari Darshan,* p. 127.

82. *Guruchand-charit*, p. 74.

83. *Harileelamrita,* p. 24; *Matua Dharma Darshan,* pp. 129, 288.

84. *Matua Dharma-Tattwa-Sar,* p. 17; *Srihari Darshan,* p. 94.

85. *Guruchand-charit*, p. 54.

86. *Srihari Darshan*, pp. 76-7.

87. *Guruchand-charit*, p. 2.

88. Ibid., p. 251; *Matua Dharma Darshan*, p. 322.

89. *Harileelamrita,* p. 24.

90. *Guruchand-charit*, p. 236.

91. *Srihari Darshan,* p. 158; *Matua Mahasangher Sangbidhan ba Gathantantra* (in Bengali; 2 nd edn, Thakurnagar, 1988), pp. 5-6.

92. *Guruchand-charit*, pp. 567-8.

93. Ramakanta Chakraborti, *Vaishnavism in Bengal,* pp. 74, 333-4; Edward C. Dimock, Jr., *The Place of the Hidden Moon,* p. 69.

94. Narendranarayan Ray Chaudhury, *Samaj-chitra* (in Bengali; Calcutta, 1322 b.s.), p. 117; Madhusudan Tattwabachaspati, *Gaudiya Vaishnava Itihas,* pp. 399-402.

95. James Wise, *Notes on the Races,* p. 259.

96. Rohini Kumar Sen, *Bakla,* p. 37; Nihar Ranjan Ray, *Bangaleer Itihas: Adi Parba* (in Bengali; 3rd edn, Calcutta, 1386 b.s.), p. 296.

97. Kaliprasanna Biswas, *Jatibibaran* (in Bengali; Rangpur, 1319 b.s.), p. 29; *Brahmavaivarttapuranam,* translated into Bengali in verse by Gayaram Batabyal (Calcutta, 1881), p. 475.

98. *Harileelamrita,* p. 24.

99. *Srihari Darshan,* p. 100.

100. *Matua Sangeet,* p. 138.

101. *Achhe dasyu ekjanre, nam tar madan, Mahasamkirtan,* p. 74.

102. *Bisuddha prem mahabhave, ghatbe akam kamana, Mahasamkirtan,* p. 50.

103. Anonymous, *Hindu Dharmaniti* (in Bengali; Calcutta, 1794 Saka), p. 83.

104. *Matua Sangeet*, p. 35.

105. Ibid., pp. 109-11.

106. *Age jadi jantem ami, eto garal e ramani, Phele giye omni kartem gurur dhyan.* Ibid., p. 79.

107. See note 64.

108. *Matua Dharma Darshan*, pp. 140, 150, 151; *Harileelamrita*, pp. 292-3; *Matua Dharma-Tattwa-Sar,* p. 39.

109. Ramakanta Chakraborti, *Vaishnavism in Bengal*, pp. 78-9.

110. *Matua Dharma Darshan,* pp. vi-vii; *Srihari Darshan,* p. 113.

111. *Matua Sangeet,* pp. 8-9, 51, 60-1, 113, 117, 120-1; *Mahasamkirtan,* p. 75; Aswini Kumar Sarkar, *Sri Sri Hari Sangeet* (in Bengali; 10 th edn, Thakurnagar, 1395 b.s.), pp. 18-19, 23.

112. *Hari Sangeet,* pp. 17, 23.

113. *Matua Sangeet,* pp. 51, 78, 113, 117.

114. H.H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes,* vol. I, p. 188.

115. Sashi Kumar Badoi Biswas, *Namasudra Dwija Taitwa* (in Bengali; Barisal, 1317 b.s.), pp. 45, 49, 59; Parbatinath Sarma, *Namasudrachar Chandrika* (in Bengali; Jessore, 1913), pp. 6-9.

116. *Guruchand-charit,* p. 123.

117. Sashi Kumar Badoi Biswas, *Namasudra Dwija Tattwa,* pp. 52-4.

118. *Hari Sangeet,* p. 150; *Matua Sangeet,* p. 101.

119. Rashbehari Ray, *SaralNamasudra Dwija Darpan* (in Bengali; Khulna, 1321 b.s.), p. 37.

120. Ramakanta Chakraborti, *Vaishnavism in Bengal*, p. 325.

121. H.H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes,* vol. I, p. 187.

122. 'Some Aspects of Popular Hinduism [Dacca]', File 32 mis.D, Paper no. 26, Diary no. 341, 'Risley Collection', microfilm, Roll no. 6, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

123. Magistrate of Khulna to Commissioner of Presidency Division, 5 June 1911, Government of Bengal, Political (Police) Proceedings, File no. P5R-1, B July 1911, Progs. nos. 326-8, WBSA.

124. Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, *Sutyagrahas in Bengal (1921–39)* (Calcutta, 1977), pp. 159-81.

125. Naresh Chandra Das, *Namasudra Sampraday*, p. 14.

126. Ibid., p. 15.

127. Cited in Ramakanta Chakraborti, *Vaishnavism in Bengal*, p. 84.

128. *Guruchand-charit,* pp. 442, 569.

129. Ibid., pp. 130, 530.

130. *Guruchand-charit*, pp. 100-2, 108, 564, 569.

131. C.S. Mead, *The Namasudras,* p. 8.

132. *Guruchand-charit,* p. 442.

133. Ibid., pp. 205-6; Naresh Chandra Das, *Namasudra Sampraday,* pp. 36-8.

134. Raicharan Biswas, *Jatiya Jagaran* (in Bengali; Calcutta, 1921), pp. 62-7.

135. For details, see Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, 'Social Protest', p. 211.

136. *Guruchand-charit,* p. 262.

137. *Matua Dharma-Tattwa-Sar,* p. 130.

138. *Guruchand-charit*, pp. 168-76.

139. For details, see Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, 'Social Protest', *passim*.

140. *Guruchand-charit,* pp. 174, 414-15, 443.

141. Government of Bengal, Home (Confidential), File nos. 599 of 1930, 597(1-3) of 1930, 345(1-3) of 1931, WBSA; Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings, vol. 7, no. 2, 20 February 1922, p. 9.

142. *Guruchand-charit,* p. 146; *Matua Dharma Darshan,* pp. 279-81.

143. Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal, 1884–1912* (Dacca, 1974), p. 251.

144. *Bengalee*, 6, 10, 11 November 1917; *The Statesman*, 6 November 1918; 'Minute on the Depressed Classes by Mr M.B. Mullick', *Report of the Bengal Franchise Committee* (Calcutta, 1932), pp. 23-4.

145. *Matua Dharma-Tattwa-Sar,* pp. 142-3.

146. Faridpur District Depressed Classes Association to the Government of India, 22 September 1932; Secretary, Faridpur District Depressed Classes Association, to Governor General and Viceroy of India, 25 September 1932, Government of India, Reforms Office, File no. 199/R/1932, NAI.

147. For details, see Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Politics and the Raj: Bengal, 1872–1937* (Calcutta, 1990), pp. 180-2, appendix IV.

148. *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 23 February 1938.

149. *Hindustan Standard,* 18, 19 March 1938; *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 29 March, 3 April 1938.

150. Upendranath Barman, *Uttar Banglar Sekal O Amar Jibansmriti* (in Bengali; Jalpaiguri, 1392 B.S.), p. 74.

151. *Hindustan Standard,* 15 March 1938.

152. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 14 April 1938.

153. Ibid., 29 July 1938.

154. *Hindustan Standard,* 2 June 1939.

155. *Matua Mahasangher Lakshya O Karmasuchi* (in Bengali; 2 nd edn, Thakurnagar, 1394 B.S.), p. 4.

156. *Matua Dharma Darshan*, p. 351.

157. *Matua Mahasangher Lakshya O Karmasuchi,* pp. 8-9, 15.

158. Naresh Chandra Das, *Namasudra Sampraday,* pp. 16-17; *Matua Dharma Darshan,* p. vi.

159. The activities of these organizations have been discussed in more detail in my forthcoming article, 'A Peasant Caste in Protest; The Namasudras ofEastern Bengal, 1872-1945', in *Caste and Communal Politics in South Asia*, ed. Suranjan Das and Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (Calcutta, 1993).

160. Naresh Chandra Das, *Namasudra Sampraday,* p. 17.

161. *Hindustan Standard,* 11 February, 3 April 1938.

Chapter 14

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Chapter 15

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1. The definition of Saivites is no doubt difficult: underlining the complexity of the whole issue in question. As P. Chidambaram Pillai, both a Saivite and a Self-Respecter, said in 1929: 'Who is a Saivite and what is Saivism are difficult to define. Sometimes it denotes a caste or sub-caste; at other times it denotes a religion; at a third it denotes a system of philosophy. It may be all three at the same time. It may indicate a Vellalar or not; it may indicate a vegetarian or non-vegetarian' *(Suyamariyathaiyum Saivamum,* Erode 1935). For purposes of the issue raised in this paper, Saivite refers to the educated elite belonging to the upper castes of Saiva Vellalars, Mudaliars, Chettiars, etc. who swore by the Saivite religion and Saiva Siddhanta philosophy and identified themselves as Saivites.

2. Maraimalai Adigal (1876-1950) was an eminent scholar in Tamil and Saivism. He was a precocious youth and was associated with P. Sundaram Pillai and Somasundara Nayagar in his youth. Acclaimed as the father of the Pure Tamil

movement, which sought to emphasize the independence and self-reliance of the Tamil language, his books also provided one of the bases for the formulation of the Dravidian ideology. As we shall see in the course of this paper he played a leading part in the conflicts between the Saivites and the Self-Respect Movement.

3. See the entries dated 27 May 1928, 5 June 1928, 16 June 1928, 26 June 1928, and 29 June 1928 (henceforth MAD). Maraimalai Adigal maintained his diaries in English from 1898 till his death in 1950. See A.R. Venkatachalapathy (ed.), *Maraimalai Adigalar Natkurippugal*, Madras, 1988. I am grateful to R. Muthukumaraswamy, Managing Director, Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society for the opportunity to edit these diaries. The hypothesis put forward in this paper was first formulated during the course of editing the diaries.

4. J.S. Kannappar was also a student of Maraimalai Adigal.

5. Satchidanandam Pillai emphasized this. The point being made is that Brahmins are not part of the Tamil people.

6. Saivites wore *thiruveneeru* or sacred ash on their forehead which constitutes a very important mark of their religion.

7. This threefold classification is drawn from the insightful observations of *Kumoran* (28 March 1928) and *Siddhantam* (May 1929); the latter actually used the English terms 'conservatives', 'moderates', and 'radicals' in parenthesis.

8. For the full text of the proceedings and resolutions of the Tirunelveli Conference, see *Siddhantam,* April 1929; *Navasakti,* 3 April 1929; *Sivanesan,* March-April 1929.

9. P. Chidambaram Pillai's address to the meet, *Suyamariyathaiyum Saivamum,* Erode, 1935, was published only many years later. But an English version of it was serialized in *Revolt* every week, from 18 August to 22 September 1929. The articles were signed 'PCP'.

10. In 1935, there was a debate between M. Raghavaiyangar and S. Soma-sundara Bharati over a stanza in Tolkappiyam, the ancient Tamil book of grammar, concerning the institution of marriage. The debate generated much heat. The Self-Respect Movement sided with S. Somasundara Bharati's refutation of Raghavaiyangar's pro-Brahmin interpretation.

11. Incidentally, the Saiva Vellalars do not find a place in the list of backward castes.

Chapter 16

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1. William Logan wrote of 'Nayars of ability' who wrested landholding rights and attracted the great body of cultivators to agricultural production centred on their households. He traced a process of the breakdown of communal rights over land in favour of individual 'families', beginning from the fifteenth century: *Malabar Land Tenures Report,* 1881 (Madras, 1882; henceforth MLTR), vol. I, p. xv. It is possible that this process gained momentum in the early nineteenth century with the expansion of land frontiers in the wake of warfare. See K.K.N. Kurup, *Pazhassi Samarangal* (Pazhassi Revolts; Trivandrum, 1980).

2. L. Moore, *Malabar Law and Custom* (2nd edn, Madras, 1900), pp. 6-8.

3. K. Madhavan, *Payaswiniyude Teerattu* (On the Banks of the Payaswini; Trivandrum, 1987), p. 14.

4. F. Fawcett, *The Nayars of Malabar* (Madras, 1901), p. 199; T.K.G. Panikkar, *Malabar and its Folk* (Madras, 1900), pp. 162-3.

5. Board of Revenue (LR) Proceedings, Forest no. 110, 7 March 1888 (Kozhikode Regional Archives; henceforth KRA); Board of Revenue (LR) Proceedings, Forest no. 635, 30 November 1888 (KRA).

6. Fawcett, *The Nayars of Malabar,* p. 199.

7. E.K. Gough, 'Changing Kinship Usages in the Setting of Political and Economic Change among the Nayars of Malabar', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 82, 1 (1952), p. 72.

8. Logan, *Malabar Manual,* vol. II, appendix XIII, pp. cixviii-xix, cxcviii.

9. A. Aiyappan, *Iravas and Culture Change* (Madras, 1944); E.J. Miller, 'Village Structure in North Kerala', in M.N. Srinivas (ed.), *India's Villages* (Bombay, 1960), p. 50.

10. *MLTR 1881,* p. xi; Fawcett, *Nayars of Malabar,* p. 311.

11. K.R. Unnis, 'Caste in South Malabar' (PhD dissertation, M.S. University, Baroda), quoted by Joan Mencher, 'Kerala and Madras: A Comparative Study of Ecology and Social Structure', *Ethnology* V, 2 (1966).

A pamphleteer of the 1920s provided a list of such names as Kanja, Nambalam, and Chathall and stated that any attempt to change a name was fraught with danger: P. Govindan, *Adidravidarude ambalapravesanam* (Temple Entry for the Adi Dravidas; Cannanore, 1925), p. 2.

13. E. Thurston and K. Rangachari, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (Madras, 1909), vol. VI, p. 120.

14. A Brahman correspondent wrote to the journal *Man* of a family in Calicut which was being harassed by evil spirits. After the scion of the Nambudiri family at Kallur professed defeat at the hands of the malevolent creatures, Parayan magicians were called in and managed to rout the forces of evil. K.V. Krishna Ayyar, 'Chathan: a Devil or a Disease', *Man* 115 (September 1928).

15. See D.M. Menon, 'Caste, Nationalism, and Communism in Malabar, 1900-1948 (PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1990), ch. 1.

16. Revenue Dept. GO.2564, 9 December 1929 (India Office Library and Records; henceforth IOL); Revenue dept. GO.2425, 23 November 1921 (IOL). The Board of Revenue was forced to recognize that unless they could lay stress on the fact that the rights of a landlord in Malabar were not more extensive than those of a ryotwari proprietor, the position of the government was 'hopeless'. Revenue R. Dis.6525/20, 18 September 1920 (KRA).

17. Evidence of R. Suryanarayana, Servants of India Member, Calicut, in *Royal Commission on Labour in India* (London, 1931), vol. VII, pt I, p. 308.

18. *Census of India, 1911,* vol. XII, Madras, pt I, Report, p. 27.

19. Simon Commander has convincingly argued that the jajmani mode of relations between rural patrons and dependants was not subverted by the forces of the market in nineteenth-century north India. It was in fact strengthened in the conditions of population growth and price inflation that prevailed. More recently, Chris Fuller has argued for a more holistic understanding of the economy in which market exchange as well as patronal relations should be seen as 'major features of the economic system as a whole': S. Commander, 'The Jajmani System in North India: An Examination of Its Logic and Status across Two Centuries', *Modern Asian Studies* 17, 2 (1983), pp. 307-8, and C.J. Fuller, 'Misconceiving the Grain Heap: A Critique of the Concept of the Indian Jajmani System', in M. Bloch and J.P. Parry (eds), *Money and the Morality of Exchange* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 51.

20. C.A. Innes, *Malabar Gazetteer* (1908; rpntd Madras, 1951), p. 249.

21. The argument is similar to that of James Scott's notion of a 'subsistence ethic'—that landowners should provide, and the state's exactions should not encroach upon, the 'minimum needs' of cultivators. Scott, however, reifies the idea as the bottom line of peasant expectations. See James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in South East Asia* (New Haven, 1976), pp. 1-10. In north Malabar, cultivators responded more flexibly, and in the face of the inability of households to provide subsistence in the 1940s, they bargained for access to land instead.

22. It is not without significance that the granaries of *tharavadus* were the centres of authority in the countryside, and it was here that Nayar landlords sat to administer justice in local cases. Testimony of Pokken Gurikkal *et al., File on the Oral History of Kasergode Taluk* (in Malayalam; A.K. Gopalan Centre, Trivandrum).

23. E.J. Miller, 'Caste and Territory in Malabar', *American Anthropologist* 56 (1954). The *puja,* establishing the relations of worship between worshipper and deity, is treated as a metaphor for social and political relations in two recent works: N.B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: The Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 47-8, and D. Ludden, *Peasant History in South India* (Princeton, 1985), p. 65.

24. Burton Stein, 'Introduction', in B. Stein (ed.), *South Indian Temples: An Analytical Consideration* (Delhi, 1978), p. 3. Emphasis added.

25. I draw upon studies on 'popular culture' in Europe, particularly the perceptive and nuanced work of Roger Chartier. Chartier lays emphasis on practice—the several understandings and ways of using cultural forms or 'artefacts'—which may be characterized as much by 'defiance and defence' as compliance and conformity. See R. Chartier, 'Culture as Appropriation: Popular Cultural Uses in Early Modern France', in S. Kaplan (ed.), *Understanding Popular Culture* (The Hague, 1985), p. 233. To a large extent, Chartier is influenced by Pierre Bourdieu's seminal *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, 1978).

26. In Malabar, unlike the rest of the Presidency, the *melkoyma,* or the right to superintend religious endowments, which had been exercised by kings and landlords, had not been taken over by the government. When the question of bringing Malabar under the 1817 regulation was raised in 1915, the then Collector, C.A. Innes, observed that, 'having regard to the usage of a hundred years . . . Government cannot apply these Regulations': Revenue DR D19/15, 16 February 1915 (KRA). See Arjun Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule: A South Indian Case* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 105, 162-3; and Dirks, *Hollow Crown,* for the Madras Presidency.

27. Report of the special duty tehsildar, 15 August 1939. R. Dis. Revenue 7034/39, 23 January 1941 (KRA). Rents on temple lands were always paid in grain, and, even during the food shortage of the 1940s, rents continued to be collected in kind.

28. *MLTR 1881-2,* lix.

29. Moore, *Malabar Law and Custom,* pp. 270, 273. British officials described these *uralar* as trustees since Indian temples were comprehended in the English model of the charitable trust. See Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict,* p. 173.

30. The list includes 9 oil pressers (Vaniyans), 2 washermen (Vannan/ Mannan), 2 weavers (Chaliyan), 8 shrine priests and oracles (Komaram/ Velichapad), 4 astrologers (Kanisans), 2 barbers for castes below Nayars (Kabutiyan), and 2 traditional teachers (Panikkar/Vadhyar): *Settlement Register for Karivellur amsam, Chirakkal taluk* (KRA).

31. C. Kunthappa, *Samaranakal Matram* [Memoirs] (Kozhikode, 1982). Kunthappa's grandfather acted as priest at the family shrine and devoted himself to the study of the Vedanta, hunting, and breeding dogs.

32. Madhavan, *Payaswinlyude Teerattu,* p. 10, a nineteenth-century account, described the Nayars as 'debauched and irregular in their habits' and prone to eating flesh and drinking strong liquors: 'Account of the Nayanmar in the Malayalam country', manuscript book no. 13, sec. 1, quoted in Rev. Wm. Taylor, 'Fifth Report of Progress Made in the Examination of the Mackenzie MSS with an abstract account of the works examined', *Madras Journal of Literature and Science* IX, 23 (1839).

33. K.R. Pisharoti, 'Notes on Ancestor Worship Current in Kerala', *Man 60* (July 1923), pp. 99-102; C.A. Menon, *Kali Worship in Kerala* (Madras, 1940), p. 82.

34. V.K. Raman Menon, 'Ancestor Worship among the Nayars', *Man 25* (1910), pp. 42-3; E.K. Gough, 'Cults of the Dead among the Nayars', *Journal of American Folklore* 71 (1958), p. 467; M. Unni Nair, *My Malabar* (Bombay, 1952).

35. In Gyan Prakash's study of relations between *kamias* (bonded labour) and *maliks* (landlords) in south Bihar, he shows how landlords reproduced the caste hierarchy by subordinating the spirit cults of their bonded labour to 'Hindu beliefs'. In Malabar, as we have seen, there is a two-way process and landlords are as much under the sway of lower-caste spirits and gods. See Gyan Prakash, 'Reproducing Inequality: Spirit Cults and Labour Relations in Colonial Eastern India', *Modern Asian Studies* 20, 2 (1986), pp. 216-21.

36. Michael Moffatt argues for replication on the grounds of the permeating structure of purity and pollution inbuilt into an undifferentiated caste culture. Dirks, though more processual and willing to historicize the notion of culture, again stresses the cultural apathy or inefficacy of client castes who 'had minimal control over the articulation of their social order' and therefore were rarely guilty of 'initiating new social forms': M. Moffatt, *An Untouchable Community in South India* (New Jersey, 1979), p. 9; Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, p. 269.

37. Fawcett, *Nayars of Malabar,* p. 268. On occasion, secular resentments intruded on the already heightened tempers within religious festivities. On 22 May 1908, 5000 'pilgrims' surrounded the Forest Office and burnt officials records after

accusing the forester of illegal trading in timber. Report of Second-class Magistrate, Kuthuparamba, 27 June 1908, and Superintendent of Police, Tellicherry, 14 June 1908, Public DR 1585/P.08 17 October 1908 (KRA).

38. A list of 'pilgrims' was provided and apart from 'the illiterate, gluttons, drunkards and rogues', there were shepherds, toddy-tappers, weavers, artisans, fishermen, oil-pressers, Pulayas and Cherumas, and Nayars of high rank: TV. Das, *Kodungallur Bharani* (The Kodungallur Festival; Kozhikode, 1920).

39. E.J. Miller, 'An Analysis of the Hindu Caste System in its Complete Interactions with the Total Social Structure in North Kerala' (PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1950), pp. 344-5.

40. Ludden, *Peasant History in South India,* p. 65. Ludden follows Marriott and Inden here in arguing that 'transactions', i.e. interactions between castes, are characterized by the exchange of substances from the 'superior' to the 'inferior'. Inherent bodily substances gathered through 'right eating, right marriage and other right exchanges and actions' determine the status of a person. For a succinct elaboration, see McKim Marriott and R.B. Inden, 'Towards an Ethnosociology of South Asian Caste Systems', in K. David (ed.), *The New Wind: Changing Identities in South Asia* (The Hague, 1977). An effective critique is offered in S.A. Barnett, L. Fruzzetti, and A. Oster, 'Hierarchy Purified: Notes on Dumont and his Critics', *Journal of Asian Studies* xxxv, 4 (1976), p. 635.

41. V. Bharateeyan, *AdimakalErigane Udamakalayi* (How the Slaves became Masters; Trivandrum, 1980), p. 79. On a visit in February 1987, I found that at Dharmadam, in Tellicherry, it is still a custom that jackfruits are not eaten before the first fruits have been offered at the shrine in Andalur.

42. Miller argues this for all castes. However, even the poorest cultivator held land under several landlords. It would be difficult to argue that loyalty towards any one particular landlord or household would prevail: Miller, 'Village Structure in North Kerala', p. 43.

43. Revenue R. Dis 7034/39, 23 January 1941 (KRA).

44. *Diaries of A.C. Kannan Nayar* (in Malayalam), 28 March 1947 (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, hereafter NMML, New Delhi).

45. See C.J. Baker, *The Politics of South India, 1917–1937* (Cambridge, 1976); and S. Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1919-1949* (Cambridge, 1986).

46. Joan Mencher, 'Possession, Dance and Religion in North Malabar, Kerala, India', *Collected Papers of the VIIIth Congress of Anthropology and Ethnographic Sciences* (Moscow, 1964), p. 340.

47. H. Gundert, *Malayalam Nighandu* (Malayalam Dictionary; Kottayam, 1962), pp. 474-5.

48. Mencher, 'Possession, Dance and Religion', p. 344. The reverent attitude of the upper castes and the feeling of power invested in the Malayan surely outlasted the space of the performance. There is a proverb in Malayalam which says of those showing false humility that they are like performing Malayans. For proverbs derived from the *teyyattam,* see C. M.S. Chanthera, *Kaliyattam* (Kottayam, 1978), pp. 290-1.

49. M.V.V. Nambudiri, *Uttara Keralathile Thottam Pattukal*(The Thottams of North Kerala; Trichur, 1981), p. 271.

50. M.N. Srinivas, 'A Note on Sanskritisation and Westernisation', in *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays* (Bombay, 1962), pp. 42-62.

51. Innes, *Malabar Gazetteer,* p. 125.

52. E.J. Edona, *The Economic Conditions of the Protestant Christians of Malabar with special reference to the Basel Mission Church* (Calicut, 1940).

53. There was two colleges in Malabar at the time, Zamorin's College, Calicut (estd. 1879), and Brennen College, Tellicherry (estd. 1891), but Tiyyas were denied admission till as late as 1918. A few went to Madras for a university education and Tiyyas constituted slightly more than a tenth of the migrants from Malabar between 1906 and 1920: K.K.N. Kurup, 'Inglish Vidyabhyasavum Samuhya Purogatiyum Malabarile Tiyyaril' (English Education and Social Progress among the Tiyyas of Malabar) in *Adhunika Keralam: Charitra Gaveshana Prabandhangai* (Modern Kerala: Essays in Historical Research; Trivandrum,

1982), pp. 31-2; Susan Lawandowski, *Migration and Ethnicity in Urban India; Kerala Migrants in the City of Madras, 1870–1940* (Delhi, 1980), pp. 59-60.

54. Revenue Dept. GO.477, 22 December 1904 (IOL), p. 21. A respondent to the Malabar Tenancy Committee of 1927 stated that the rajas of Kadathunad and Chirakkal were unable to pay off the value of improvements and evict their tenants, and the latter had had to borrow Rs 75,000 to settle claims. Oral evidence of E.G. Nair, High Court vakil, Tellicherry, *Malabar Tenancy Committee Report, 1927* (Madras, 1928), vol. II, pp. 180-1.

55. Samuel Aaron, the proprietor of Aaron Mills, estimated that between 100 and 150 such 'factories' were founded by Tiyya entrepreneurs between 1914 and 1919: S. Aaron, *Jeevitha Smaranakal* (An Autobiography; Cannanore, 1974), pp. 45-8. The upwardly-spiralling prices of cotton twist had affected the handloom weavers severely, and these 'factories' took over the manufacture of cheap cloth: Revenue DR.6431/16, 27 April 1919 (KRA).

56. K.R. Achuthan, *C. Krishnan* (Kottayam, 1971), pp. 72-3. Apart from encroaching on the credit circuits of the Mappilas, Tiyya merchants, borne on the backs of the rising price of coconuts, were beginning 'to poach into the commercial preserves of the Mappilas'. By 1915, the rivalry between Tiyya and Mappila traders was so acute that Kottieth Ramunni, a prominent Tiyya lawyer in Tellicherry, was asked to form a conciliation board. DR Magisterial D. 298/M.15, 13 June 1915 (KRA).

57. *Census of India, 1921,* vol. XIII, Madras, Report, p. 193; D. Narayana Rao, *Report on the Survey of Cottage Industries in the Madras Presidency* (Madras, 1929), pp. 133-6.

58. Evidence of Rao Sahib V.K. Menon, Secretary, Malabar District Cooperative Bank, Calicut, *Royal Commission on Labour in India* (London, 1931), vol. VII, pt 1, pp. 287-8.

59. Narayana Rao, *Report on the Survey of Cottage Industries,* p. 19.

60. Address of P. Krishna Pillai at All-Malabar Workers' Conference, November 1937, *Mathrubhumi* (16 November 1937).

61. In a statement revealing the expectations of different conditions in factories, which were nearly always belied, K.P Gopalan, an early socialist trade unionist, reminisced: 'It was shameful that a manager should subject the worker, to such beastly atrocities in the middle of a *civilised* town' (emphasis added): *Prabhatham* (5 December 1938).

62. Interspersed among these descriptions of an idle idyll are trenchant observations on the 'stratagems' of the Company which denied the worker a proper wage and on workers who wasted away amidst the omnipresent sawdust: R. Kuttan, *Irakampinipattu* (Song of the Sawmill; Palghat, 1916).

63. *Papers on Industrial Conference,* September 1908, Ootacamund, p. 59. Evidence of G.F. Baker, Henke's Tile Works, Feroke, *Report of the Indian Industrial Commission,* 1916-18, vol. III, pp. 358-60; *Report on the Working of Department of Industry in the Madras Presidency,* 1926-7, pp. 21, 34; 1932-3, p. 21; 1933-4, p. 28; 1935-6, p. 37.

64. Most of the emigrants to Ceylon were untouchables and about 10,000 Parayans had emigrated between 1900 and 1921. *Census of India, 1921,* vol. XIII, Madras, pt 1, Report, p. 49.

65. K.S. Narayanan, *Teendalvairi* (Against Untouchability; Calicut, 1927).

66. P. Govindan, *Keraliya Karmmala Samaja Vijnapanam* (A Prospectus for the Association of Artisans; Calicut, 1911). He was very conscious of living in 'an age of progress marked by the steam engine and telegraph', and in which the English had been 'outdistanced' by the Germans, because the latter had a system of 'scientific education'.

67. *Hindu,* 29 June 1920. It is significant that untouchable movement even elsewhere in India saw the basic polarity in society as being between 'knowledge and ignorance' rather than a Dumontian opposition of 'purity and pollution'. The Ad Dharm movement in Punjab had as one of its slogans, 'Education leads us to where the truth resides'. M. Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision: The Movement against Untouchability in Twentieth-Century Punjab* (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 119-20.

68. Evidence ofV.V. Parameswara Ayyar, Palghat, *Report of the Unemployment Commission, 1927,* p. 251.

69. Robin Jeffrey, 'The Social Origins of a Caste Association', 1875, 1905, the Founding of the SNDP Yogam', *South Asia* 4 (1974), p. 44.

70. See M.S.A. Rao, *Social Movements and Social Transformation: A Study of Two Backward Class Movements* (Delhi, 1979). For the content of Nara- yana Guru's theology, see V.T. Samuel, '"One caste, one religion, and one God for man": A Study of Sree Narayana Guru (1854-1928) of Kerala, India' (PhD dissertation, Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1973).

71. When subscriptions for the Sundareswara temple were being raised, Aaron Senior (who, though a Christian convert, maintained his links with the Tiyya community) donated a 'large sum' to Narayana Guru: Aaron, *Jivitha Smaranakal,* p. 56.

72. G. Lemereinier, *Religion and Ideology in Kerala* (tr. Y. Rendel; Delhi, 1984), p. 248. For early analyses on the same model, see M.S.A. Rao, *Social Change in Malabar* (Bombay, 1957), and idem, *Social Movements and Social Transformation.*

73. Washbrook understands the establishment of separate temples and the rejection of Brahman influence in purely functional terms. He situates these trends in the particular context of the fashioning of caste identity as nothing more than a lobby in local and municipal politics. The 'non-Brahman could not lead his caste as an autonomous political community fighting against other autonomous political communities while its members were deferring to the authority of outsiders. He had to be anti-Brahman . . . if he were to make the constituency his own':D. A. Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics: The Madras Presidency, 1870-1920* (Cambridge, 1976), p. 282. Since Washbrook uses only government records and no vernacular sources whatsoever, it is not surprising that he defines politics as only that which engages with the government.

74. Oral evidence of A.K. Sankara Varma Raja, Valiya Raja of Kadathunad, *MTCR, 1927-8,* II, p. 318.

75. *Mithavadi*, November 1918.

76. Bayly and Bayly write of the increasing use of sweets, sugar, and milk in ritual from the eighteenth century with the rise of stable regional governments and the increasing prosperity of urban merchants: Christopher Bayly and Susan Bayly, 'Eighteenth-Century State Forms and the Economy', in C. Dewey (ed.), *Arrested Development in India: The Historical Dimension* (New Delhi and Maryland, 1988), p. 69.

77. P. Govindan, *Adidravidarude Ambala Pravesanam* (Temple Entry for Adi Dravidas; Calicut, 1915), p. 7. He pointed out that the new temples had *puja, kirtanams* (community singing), *naivedyam* (offering of clarified butter), *deeparadhana* (worship of the idols with lamps), and other wholesome forms of worship.

78. *Mithavadi,* 2 May 1921.

79. Oral evidence of E.G. Nair, High Court vakil, Tellicherry, *MTCR, 1927-8*, vol. II, p. 163.

80. This stance continued until the mid-1930s, when the combination of the impact of the Depression, the rising commercial strength of the Mappila community, and the possibility of engagement with a wider politics after the passing of the Government of India Act, 1935, precipitated a crisis of sorts. The younger generation of Tiyyas moved towards the Congress with the adoption of a militant 'Hindu' identity. See Menon, 'Caste, Nationalism and Communism', ch. 5.

81. Gyan Prakash offers a pathbreaking exposition of how colonial discourse reinterpreted complex reciprocal relations between landlords *(maliks)* and labourers (*kamias*) in south Bihar within a discourse of 'exploitation' and 'unfreedom'. It is interesting to see how lower-caste movements of the twentieth century cast the debate within very much the same mould. Gyan Prakash, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 1-13, 218-26.

82. Washbrook, *Emergence of Provincial Politics,* pp. 50-2.

83. *Report on the Administration of Akbari Revenue in the Madras Presidency*, 1890-1900, p. 44, Appendix E-109.

84. Petition of tappers to the Kerala Labour Union, Mithavadi, September 1918. The *menokki,* excise official, became an object of universal hatred and Nayanar's satirical short story, 'Who killed the *menokki*?' (1893) reflected the general attitude. When a *menokki* went missing, it was assumed as a matter of course that he had been killed by a tapper. After the tapper had been considerably harried, it was discovered that the *menokki*, after a heavy meal, had lain down to rest under a tree and presently died. V.K. Nayanar, *Menokkiye Konnathu AaranuV Kesari Fayanarude Kirthikal* (The Collected Works of Kesari Nayanar; Calicut, 1987), pp. 6-13.

85. L.M. Carroll, 'The Temperance Movement in India: Politics and Social Reform', *Modern Asian Studies* 10, 3 (1976), p. 420; Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism* (Delhi, 1966), pp. 556-61.

86. K.P Karunakara Menon, *History of the Freedom Movement in Kerala* (Trivandrum, 1972), II, p. 69.

87. C. Padmavathi Amma, *Chakramahima* (The Saga of the Charkha; Calicut, 1920).

88. Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York, 1982), pp. 193-201.

89. See E. Zelliott, 'Congress and the Untouchables, 1915-50', in R. Sisson and S. Wolpert (eds), *Congress and Indian Nationalism: The Pre-Independence Phase* (Berkeley, 1988).

90. C.K. Nambiar, *Svatantrayuddham* (Tellicherry, 1924).

91. Gandhi to George Joseph, 6 April 1924, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (henceforth *CWMG;* Ahmedabad, 1967), vol. XXIII, p. 391. Gandhi clarified that the Congress resolution at Nagpur had called upon only the 'Hindu members' to remove the curse of untouchability.

92. *CWMG,* vol. XXIII, pp. 441-2.

93. Jeffrey, 'Status, Class and the Growth of Radial Politics', pp. 153-2.

94. Nambiar, *Svatantrayuddham*.

95. *Diaries of A.C. Kannan Nayar,* 23 June and 7 July 1929 (NMML).

96. *Mathrubhumi*, 29 May 1934.

97. See the *Diaries of A.C. Kannan Nayar;* Sankaran, *Ente Jivitha Katha.*

98. See G. Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, 1926–34: A Study in Imperfect Mobilisation* (Delhi, 1978), chs 2 and 3, for similar activity in U.P. and the utilization of the Kumbh Mela, for example, for Congress propaganda.

99. K. Kelappan to J. Nehru, 23 October 1931, All-India Congress Committee File G/86, 1931 (NMML).

Chapter 17

* This is an unpublished essay based on Tanika Sarkar, 'Caste, Sect and Hagiography: The Balakdashis of Early Modern Bengal', in *Rebels, Wives, Saints: Designing Selves and Nations in Colonial Times*, Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009, pp. 69–120.

1. The literature on Gaudiya Vaisnavism in Bengal and Chaitanya bhakti in eastern India is considerable. I found two works especially important: S.K. De, *The Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movements in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1961; Ramakanta Chakravarti, *Vaisnavism in Bengal,* Calcutta, 1985.

2. I have explored certain aspects of this sect in 'Caste, Sect and Hagiography: The Balakdasis of Early Modern Bengal' in *Rebels, Wives, Saints: Designing Selves and Nations in Colonial Times,* Ranikhet, 2009.

3. Balak's life is described in a late hagiography, written by an upper-caste, educated admirer: Satyendranath Basu, *Siddha Mahatma Balakdasher Jiboni*, Calcutta, 1913.

4. The hagiographical and sectarian aspects of this faith are detailed in Tanika Sarkar, 'Caste, Sect and Hagiography', in *Rebels, Wives, Saints.*

5. Sureshchandra Bandyopadhya, *Smritishastre Bangali*, Calcutta, 1961.

6. His hagiographer was an early-twentieth-century modern conservative and upper-caste man who was keen to publicize his life because of Balak's devotion to brahmans and adherence to caste hierarchy. At a time when some anti-brahman movements challenged upper-caste dominance in several parts of India, including Bengal, Basu saw in this sect a counterpoint to rebellious social movements, one that was felicitously offered by a shudra savant. His seems to be the only hagiographical work that survives and it is unlikely, given that Balak's devotees were low-caste peasants and traders, that any others were written.

7. For some accounts of the discovery, see Charlotte Vaudeville, 'Multiple Approaches to a Living Myth: The Lord of the Govardhana Hill', in Gunther Sontheimer and Herman Kulke, eds, *Hinduism Reconsidered*, Delhi, 1989; on the importance of the idol as living god, see June McDaniel, 'Folk Vaisnavism and the Thakur Panchayat: Life and Status among Village Krishna Statues', in Gary L. Beck, ed., *Alternative Krishnas: Regional and Vernacular Variations on a Hindu Deity,* Albany, 2005. Also, David Mason, *Theatre and Religion on Krishna's Stage: Performing in Vrindaban,* London, 2009, on the Krishna idol coming alive during certain ritual performances.

8. *Taraknath Mahatmya,* pilgrimage tract, n.d., circulated and sold at Tarakeshwar.

9. Christopher Aslet, 'Some Reflections on Hindu Iconography', in Karel Werner, ed., *Love Divine: Studies in Bhakti and Devotional Mysticism*, London, 1993, p. 209.

10. This is especially true of the first Bengali hagiography, Brindaban Das' *Chaitanya Bhagabat* (ed. Atul Krishna Goswami, Calcutta, 1901), composed shortly after Chaitanya's death. All references to the text are to pp. 15-80.

11. Tony K. Stewert, 'On Changing the Perception of Chaitanya's Divinity', in Joseph. T. O'Connell, ed., *Bengali Vaisnavism, Orientalism, Society and the Arts,* Asian Studies Centre, Michigan State University South Asia Series, Occasional Papers 35, Summer 1985, p. 40.

12. The early life of Vrindaban Das was a matter of especial interest since there was a whiff of bastardy associated with his birth. See Ramakanta Chakravarty.

13. Dineshchandra Sen, *Bangla Bhasha O Sahitya,* Calcutta, 1901, pp. 552-71.

14. Sukumar Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihas,* vols 1 and 2, Calcutta, 1965 and 1970.

15. S.K. De, *Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century,* Calcutta, 1962, p. 344.

16. There is no mention of a temple or an important sculptural piece devoted to Uma in David McCutcheon's very comprehensive survey. See idem, *Late Medieval Temples of Bengal,* Calcutta, 1972,

17. On songs dedicated to Uma, see Rachel McDermott, *Singing to the Goddess: Poems to Kali and Uma from Bengal,* Oxford, 2001.

18. On the importance of the infant Krishna in other Indian contexts, see Carl Olson, *The Many Colors of Hinduism: A Thematic-Historical Introduction,* New Brunswick, 2007, ch. 8; David Kinsey, *The Divine Player: A Study of Krishna,* Delhi, 1979; Jack Hawley, *Krishna the Butter Thief*, Princeton, 1983.

19. Michael Moffat, *An Untouchable Community in South India: Structure and Consensus,* Princeton, 1979.

20. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal,1872–1947,* London, 1997.

21. B.S. Cohn, 'The Changing Status of a Depressed Caste', in idem, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays,* Delhi, 1987.

22. For an elaboration of its core doctrine, see Krishnadas Kaviraj, *Chaitanyacharitamrta,* ed. Shashibhushan Bandyopadhya, Kalna, 1923; Hitesranjan Sanyal, 'Trends of Change in Bhakti Movement in Bengal', Occasional Paper, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, July 1985.

23. This strain became pervasive in popular esoteric cults that derived some of their devotional concepts from Gaudiya Vaisnavism. See Edward C. Dimock, Jr, *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaisnava Sahajiya Cult of Bengal,* Chicago, 1966.

24. S.K. De and Ramakanta Chakravarty, op. cit.

25. For an elaboration of this, see Hitesranjan Sanyal, 'Transformation of the Regional Bhakti Movement', in Frank Reynolds and Donald Capps, ed., *The*

Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion, The Hague, 1976.

26. Satyendranath Basu, op. cit.

27. L.S.S. O' Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers—Khulna,* Calcutta, 1908, p. 73.

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CASTE IN MODERN INDIA

A Reader

VOLUME 2

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SUMIT SARKAR AND TANIKA SARKAR

1

Agricultural Labourers in Modern India and Pakistan*

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The agrarian society in pre-nineteenth-century India [1] consisted of largely self-sufficient village communities in which the cultivators and artisans had lived together for centuries on the basis of traditional arrangements regulating the exchange of the cultivators' products and the artisans' services. Each farmer carried on the cultivation of his farm with the assistance of his own family. In such a society, founded on the integrated unity of agriculture and handicraft, there was little room for the existence of an independent and distinct class of landless agricultural labourers whose main source of livelihood was work on the land of others for which they received compensation in kind or cash.

All accounts dealing with India prior to the twentieth century drew attention to the relative absence of such an independent class of landless agricultural labourers. [2] This was also conclusively proved by the census returns for the last three decades of the nineteenth century which showed that agricultural labourers formed less than 15 per cent of the agricultural population covered by the census enumerations (see Table 1).

Sir Henry Maine, with deep historical insight remarked during the third quarter of the nineteenth century that 'just as according to the Brahminical theory, each of the Indian sacred rivers loses in time its sanctity, India itself is gradually losing everything which is characteristic of it.' [3] His brilliant remarks were amply justified by the census returns during the first four decades of the twentieth century (see Table 1). The 1931 census returns disclosed that by then agricultural labourers came to form close to two-fifths of the agricultural population of India; their proportion virtually tripled from nearly 13 per cent in the late nineteenth century to 38 per cent in 1931, thus indicating that they had become numerically the *largest* group. This remarkable increase reflects the most dramatic social transformation in the entire history of Indian rural society. [4]

Table 1

Occupational Composition of the Agrarian Society in India and the Proportion of Agricultural Labourers Therein: 1871–1931 (in millions)

Occupation	Adult male workers 1871–2	Male workers 1881	Population supported			Working population	
			1891	1901	1911	1921	1931
Total agricultural population[a] of which	45.7	83.7	200.0	204.1	225.3	106.2	4.2
Rent-receivers					7.7	3.7	4.2
Owner cultivators	37.5	71.2	175.4	152.7	167.0	74.7	28.4
Tenant cultivators							36.2
Agricultural Labourers of which	8.2[b]	12.5[b]	25.5	52.4	50.6	27.8	42.2
Farm labourers				33.5	41.2	21.7	33.5
Unspecified labourers[c]				16.9[b]	8.3	5.1	7.5
Plantation labourers				1.0	1.1	1.0	1.2
Proportion of agricultural labourers: in per cent	18.0[b]	15.0[b]	13.0	25.1[b]	22.0	26.2	38.0

Sources: *Memorandum on the Census of India (1871–72)* (London, 1875), p. 55; *Financial and Commercial Statistics for British India* (Calcutta, 1899), Sixth Issue, pp. 18–19; Reports on the Census of India (1901), vol. I, part II, 368ff; (1911), I, part-II, 262ff; (1921), I, part II, 200ff, and (1931), I, part II, 206ff.

(a) The coverage in 1871–2 was limited to British India, inclusive of British Burma; for the census years 1881 and 1891, it was extended to a few feudatory states, such as Baroda, Central India States, Hyderabad, Kashmir, Mysore and Rajputana. Since 1901, however, nearly the entire territory of India, including Burma, is covered.

(b) These figures are overstatements owing to inclusion of some non-agricultural labourers. *Financial and Commercial Statistics,* loc. cit., p. xvii.

(c) A very large number of persons, who as the Census Commissioners have invariably insisted, 'were in reality

field labourers' and 'must be collated' with them, have been, for inadequately explained reasons, classified separately as 'unspecified labourers' in the census returns. For the opinions of Census Commissioners to this effect, see *Census Report* (1911), vol. I, pt I, 413–14; (1921), vol. I, pt I, 246; (1931), vol. VII, pt I, 193. For these reasons their numbers have been added to those of agricultural labourers here.

In the light of the results of the 1931 census returns, it is illuminating to note the manner in which the Royal Commission on Agriculture had brushed aside the problem of agricultural labourers in these words: 'The labour problem is, therefore, from the agricultural point of view, a simple one: to lessen the pressure on land. The essential condition for relieving pressure on land is, therefore, in our opinion, mobility.' [5]

It followed from such a brusque appraisal that the Royal Commission did not consider it necessary to devote more than 5.5 pages to this problem in their rather voluminous report covering close to 700 pages. Other economists, generally following in the footsteps of the Royal Commission, neglected to pay sufficient attention to this largest, though newly born, class of the agrarian society in India. In point of fact, however, it is impossible to make a proper study of Indian agrarian society without placing in proper perspective this class whose rapid evolution to predominance within the agrarian society is itself the most eloquent symptom of the thorough transformation of the traditional Indian agrarian society.

It is clear from the provincial census returns that the proportion of agricultural labourers to the agricultural population varies from province to province (see Table 2). However, a closer analysis reveals that these variations present a distinct pattern which makes it possible to divide British India into three major regions based on the proportion of agricultural labourers within the agricultural population. On the basis of the 1931 census returns, this proportion was the highest, that is, nearly half of the agricultural population, in the *Southern Triangle* comprising Bombay, Madras, and the Central Provinces; it was the

lowest, that is, below one-fifth, in the *Great North* comprising the United Provinces, the Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province; between these two extremes, it was nearly one-third in the *Eastern Region* comprising Bihar and Orissa, Bengal, and Assam. In short, the proportion is greatest in the Southern Triangle and it begins to taper off as one proceeds north-east towards Bihar and Orissa and from there, further eastwards toward Bengal and Assam on the one hand, and north-westward towards the United Provinces, the Punjab, and the N.W.F.P. on the other. This regional demarcation is strikingly borne out by various individual village studies. [6]

Table 2

The Number of Agricultural Labourers and their Proportion to the Agricultural Population in Various Regions of British India: 1901–1931

Region	*Population supported*		*Working population*	
	1901	1911	1921	1931
A. *Number in millions*:				
Total for the regions:				
Agricultural population	(160.0)[a]	176.2	82.4	82.2
of which agri. labourers	(31.2)	(36.2)	20.4	29.8
I. *The Southern Triangle*:	16.6	17.2	10.2	15.7
Bombay (incl. Sind)	4.2	3.6	1.4	4.2
C.P. and Berar	4.2	4.4	3.2	3.9
Madras	8.2	9.2	3.6	7.6
II. *The Eastern Region*:	(5.8)	(11.3)	6.5	9.1
Bihar and Orissa	(3.6)	7.1	3.8	5.0
Bengal	(1.4)	(3.4)	2.1	3.3
Assam	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.7
III. *The Great North*:	8.8	7.7	3.7	5.1
The United Provinces	7.5	6.2	3.0	4.0
The Punjab	1.2	2.4	0.7	1.0
N.W.F.P.	0.1	0.1		0.1
B. *Proportion in per cent*:				
Total for the regions:				
Agricultural production	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
of which agri. labourers	(19.5)[a]	(20.5)	24.8	36.3
I. *The Southern Triangle*:	34.4	31.3	36.5	53.8
Bombay (incl. Sind)	35.2	27.6	27.8	56.7
C.P. and Berar	42.4	37.0	43.4	51.7
Madras	30.3	30.7	36.1	52.9
II. *The Eastern Region*:	(9.6)	(16.3)	22.1	32.9
Bihar and Orissa	(14.0)	24.1	26.0	35.2
Bengal	(4.8)	(10.0)	17.7	33.2
Assam	15.2	13.8	19.9	22.2
III. *The Great North*:	17.4	14.9	14.8	19.9
The United Provinces	21.2	17.2	15.6	21.9
The Punjab	8.1	16.9	12.9	14.4
N.W.F.P.	8.3	7.7	5.9	87.9

Sources: Separate *Census Reports* for each of the provinces mentioned for the year stated.

(a) The figures in brackets are understatements owing to the lack of data on unspecified labourers for Bengal, Bihar and

Orissa which were jointly covered as one region during 1901 and 1911; however, the total for India in Table 1 includes this figure.

On the basis of the data in Table 2, it is not possible for us to determine in general terms the proportion of landless agricultural labourers to the total agricultural population in the Republic of India as well as in Pakistan. Areas with a relatively smaller proportion of agricultural labourers, such as West Punjab, N.W.F.P., Sind and East Bengal, now form Pakistan; whereas others with a much larger concentration of agricultural labourers constitute the Republic of India. As a result, it is estimated that agricultural labourers form less than one-fifth of the agricultural population in Pakistan, whereas in the Republic of India this proportion is higher than two-fifths.

II

The above presentation gives rise to a number of pertinent questions. What were the circumstances that were responsible for such a rapid increase in the size of the class of landless agricultural labourers? What accounts for the unique regional differences in their proportion? Do they form a homogeneous class all over India or are there markedly different types within them in the various regions of India? In the absence of adequate data and previous analytical studies, it is obviously very difficult to provide precise and definitive answers to any of these questions. However, an attempt is made in the following pages to provide some answers which, though tentative, might usefully serve as points of departure for further studies.

After Baden-Powell's detailed study of the extensive literature on land settlements in India, it is now possible to form some general outline of the structure of landholding in pre-British India. [7] He has marshalled impressive evidence to show that there was no uniform type of communal or joint landholding throughout India. There were, in fact, two main patterns in which land was held: the communal or joint form of landholding in which land was held jointly by the village community and the severally or the *raiyatwari* form of landholding in which land

was held in entirely separate units by different cultivators. In general he found that the joint form was prevalent in India, north of the Vindhya mountain ranges, i.e. in the UP, the Punjab, and the whole of Upper India; the raiyatwari form, on the other hand, was prevalent in north-east, central, south and south-west India, i.e. in Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, the Central Provinces, Madras, and Bombay. [8]

It is evident that there is a close correlation between Baden-Powell's regional demarcation of India on the basis of forms of landholding and the regional pattern, shown in the preceding section of this article, based on the proportional size of the class of agricultural labourers. The Great North, where we found the proportion of agricultural labourers to be the smallest, that is, below one-fifth of the agricultural population, is precisely the region where Baden-Powell found the joint form of landholding to prevail; in the Eastern Region and the Southern Triangle, where this proportion is relatively higher, the raiyatwari form of landholding prevailed. This correlation, however, is not a causal relationship, for in the structure of both the joint and the raiyatwari forms of landholding in pre-nineteenth-century India, there was little room for the existence of a large and distinct class of landless labourers. The clues to the evolution of this class are, therefore, to be found in the factors that led to the disintegration of the traditional agrarian society—that is, in the land policies pursued by the British in India since the closing years of the eighteenth century in particular and in the general economic evolution of India during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in general.

A number of students of Indian economics have advanced the view that a rapid growth of population in India was responsible for the increase in the numbers of landless labourers. It should be patently obvious that such a view, depending primarily on a more or less uniform pattern of population growth for the whole of India, cannot even superficially pretend to touch the problem of explaining such distinctly different regional patterns of growth in the numbers of agricultural labourers. The explanation, therefore, has to be sought in factors other than an easy reference to population growth.

The land settlements introduced by the British in India between 1793 and the middle of the nineteenth century fall under three main types: the zamindari settlement which created large individual landlords was introduced in the Eastern Region (excluding Assam) in 1793; the raiyatwari settlement which dealt with individual landholders was introduced in the Southern Triangle; and the *mahalwari* settlement, which dealt neither with large individual landlords nor with small peasant landholders but with the village elders in their capacity as landlords, was introduced in the Great North. In all these settlements, the traditional institution of village community was completely sidetracked and the manner and mode of revenue payment were overhauled. The general pattern of the raiyatwari and mahalwari land settlements was not altogether different from the pre-nineteenth-century forms of landholding in the Southern Triangle and the Great North. Zamindari settlement, however, was entirely different.

Under the zamindari settlement, former tax-gatherers (known as zamindars), who were no more than agents of the former governments appointed for the collection of land revenue, were, by the Act of 1793, declared full proprietors of the area over which their rights of land revenue collection extended. Such a decision was taken by Lord Cornwallis of Yorktown 'fame' despite the strong objections put forward by Shore and James Grant (Jr.) in their long and laborious minutes. [9] The reasons for so rudely dispossessing millions of landholders and turning them overnight into tenants-at-will are buried deep in what R.H. Tawney called 'the dust in the forgotten lumber-rooms' of history. However, to understand the present, it is necessary to disturb the long-settled layers of this dust.

Lord Cornwallis himself declared in one of his circulars dated 18 September 1789, and quoted by M. Kovalevsky in his hitherto untranslated scholarly work in Russian, *Obschinnoye Zyemlevladyenie: Prichini, Khodi i Posled' stviya evo Razlozyeniya:* 'I am fully convinced that the Zamindars have the most unquestionable proprietorship of the land. I am also convinced that even if they did not have the right to the proprietorship of the soil, the *well-being of the society would compel us*

to acknowledge it in them. I do not even consider it necessary to pass a judgment on the grounds of their claims to private ownership of the soil.' [10] Thus, *by the force and authority of the British Government in India,* millions of cultivators were transformed, almost overnight, from peasant proprietors into tenants-at-will. In the whole history of mankind, ancient or modern, one would look in vain for a parallel to this classic example wherein so many were sacrificed in such a short time so that a few may prosper and rule. [11]

The essential difference between the raiyatwari settlement in the Southern Triangle and the zamindari and mahalwari in the rest of India consisted in this: under the raiyatwari settlement, the individual cultivator was given title to land which was inheritable, *transferable and otherwise alienable* without the sanction of the government; [12] whereas under the zamindari he had no such right, and under the mahalwari system his right was restricted. [13] This difference is of very great significance in our discussion.

III

With the above background, we shall review briefly the major economic changes that took place in the agrarian society during the nineteenth century and how they affected cultivation and handicraft, the supporting pillars of Indian rural economy. Since a study of the handicraft industry is beyond the scope of this article, we will merely take note of the fact that imports of cheap manufactured goods had nearly destroyed this industry and thus, in the absence of any other occupation, forced the artisans to turn to the land for their livelihood. [14] Most of these displaced persons had to work as agricultural labourers. [15] Now we shall draw attention to cultivation.

With the introduction of British land settlements, the individual cultivator, especially in the raiyatwari areas, was called upon to pay a fixed sum of *cash* assessment. The cultivator 'who had never handled coin before in his life was required to pay to his government twice a year a fixed sum of money—crop or no crop.' [16] If the cultivator failed

to pay the revenue in time, his land was made subject to forfeiture. In the early days, when cash crops, commercial agriculture, and the circulation of money in the countryside had barely begun to develop, the farmer, even though not poor otherwise, was poor in pecuniary terms. As Colonel Sykes remarked about the conditions of people eighty to a hundred miles inland from Bombay: 'There is no doubt, however, that the poverty complained of is not the poverty of want. This poverty is pecuniary poverty and it bears heavily on him in the relation in which he stands to the government and his creditors. He cannot convert a superfluity of grain into money to pay his taxes to the former, and to fulfil even part of his engagements to the latter.' [17]

In pre-British India, as the Royal Commission on Agriculture pointed out, 'land had been practically unsaleable. Land was totally valueless unless they cultivated it; it had no market price for no one would buy it or make advances upon it as security.' [18] Now land was made transferable by law; moreover, in sharp contrast to pre-British times, legal machinery in the form of civil courts of law was created to enforce such transfers. [19] All this increased the value of land as a security for monetary advances.

Besides the heavy and rigid revenue demands of the government, uncertainty of crops caused by natural calamities added to the farmers' need for borrowing. Within a period of 130 years of British rule in India, there were 22 officially declared famines, or 1 every 6 years; [20] of the 'unofficial' famines and scarcities, there is no count. By this time, another important factor added to the farmers' troubles. With the increase in cash crops, regional specialization and the development of the grain market in the countryside, the cultivator entered 'the orbit of world prices'; [21] thus, to the uncertainties of nature, for which he could at least pray to heaven or blame his past misdeeds, were added the uncertainties of world prices. Aided by the unholy trinity—heavy cash revenue demands, famines, and world price fluctuations—the moneylenders, former 'humble servants and accountants', now turned into what Max Weber called 'virtuosos in unscrupulous profiteering', began to play a dominating role in the agrarian society.

As a result, as the Indian Famine Commission of 1901, under the able chairmanship of A.P. McDonnell, pointed out, while the government did nothing, 'the cultivators sank deeper into debt and their property began to pass out of their hands. *It must be admitted that the conditions on which, under the revenue system, the cultivators, held their lands, helped to bring this result about. The rigidly of the revenue system forced them into debt,* while the valuable property (land) which they held made it easier to borrow.' [22]

The same Commission noted that whereas in 1876 only one-third of cultivators in Bombay Province were reported to be in debt, in 1900 four-fifths were in debt. [23] No data on agricultural indebtedness are available for the nineteenth century; but according to the various estimates, total rural debt in British India increased from Rs 300 crores in 1911 to Rs 1800 crores in 1938, that is, 6 times. [24] These are staggering figures.

Indebtedness means almost certain transfer of land. The Deccan Riots Commission of 1876 noted that 'the instances of redemption of mortgage are almost unknown; a mortgage is equivalent to a transfer of the ryot's title.' [25] In his evidence to the Indian Famine Commission of 1901, the Chief Secretary of the Bombay Government stated that 28 per cent of the land in the Broach district had passed into the hands of the moneylenders; on the basis of additional evidence, the Famine Commission concluded that at least one-fourth of the cultivators of Bombay Province had lost possession of their lands. [26]

In his letter of 3 February 1893, Mr A. Rogers, a member of the I.C.S. and of the Bombay Legislative Council from 1872 to 1877, disclosed that within 10 years, from 1879-80 to 1889-90, nearly two million acres of land held by more than 800,000 cultivators as well as property worth Rs three million were sold in auction by the government for the collection of land revenue. [27] The *Reports* of the Bombay Land Revenue Administration for the years 1926–7 and 1936–7 also showed that between these years five million acres or more than one-fifth of the land

held by cultivators passed into the hands of the moneylenders and the number of owner cultivators declined by 9 per cent. [28]

These are but some examples of available data on the dispossession of the peasants. Many more examples can easily be added from regional and village surveys. [29] It was in this process that, on the one hand, lands of unprotected cultivators began to be concentrated in the hands of a few moneylenders, and, on the other, larger masses of peasantry began to roll down the social ladder as tenants-at-will and landless labourers. *It was in this process of dispossession of the peasantry that the large and distinct class of landless labourers was born.*

Concerning all the 'measures' taken by the government to 'protect' the cultivators, we shall be content here to cite the scathing verdict passed by the Indian Famine Commission of 1901, which was appointed by the government. The Commission concluded: 'Commissions have sat and reported; Acts of legislation have been passed and amended; executive action of various sorts has been taken. But of all, the result has been disappointment.' [30] In sharp contrast to this callousness on the part of the government, the Indian peasants on their part have a long, but unfortunately unrecorded, history of sporadic but bitter and bloody struggles and rebellions against the policies and the symbols of these policies which uprooted them. [31]

With this brief historical background, we may now proceed to examine the causes that may help us toward some meaningful understanding of the distinct regional patterns in the evolution of agricultural labourers. Noting the broad differences in the proportion of agricultural labourers in various parts, the Census Commissioner for 1911 concluded 'that the differences are due to social rather than economic conditions, and that those provinces have most field labourers which contain the largest proportion of depressed castes.' [32] This view that the proportion of agricultural labourers varies directly with that of the depressed classes has been generally accepted by students of Indian economics. [33] It is extremely difficult to verify these proportions for the term 'depressed' classes is a loose one, not easily

defined. [34] Nonetheless, in Table 3 we have tried to show both these proportions, which, though not strictly comparable, may serve as rough indicators.

From Table 3 it should be clear that if anything, there is a sort of an inverse (particularly at the extremes), rather than a direct, correlation between the proportions of the depressed classes and agricultural labourers. The proportion of the former is the lowest in Bombay, whereas that of the latter is the highest; on the other hand, in the United Provinces, the proportion of the former is the highest, whereas that of the latter is the lowest if Punjab is excluded. The chief explanation for the regional patterns in the proportion of agricultural labourers, therefore, cannot be seriously sought in the proportion of the depressed classes.

As pointed out earlier, if the dispossession of the peasants was the chief factor in the evolution of landless agricultural labourers as a large and distinct class, it is obvious that such a class should have the largest proportion where land transferability was the easiest—that is, in the raiyatwari region or what we have termed the Southern Triangle; similarly this proportion should be smaller where land transferability was very limited as in the zamindari and mahalwari areas, or in the Eastern Region and the Great North. What remains to be explained is the disparity between the proportion of agricultural labourers in the Eastern Region and the Great North. The chief factor for this disparity seems to be the fact that in the Eastern Region the British administration and its land settlements together with the disintegration of the village communities and of the traditional form of agrarian society started much earlier than in the Great North.

Table 3

The Proportions of Depressed Classes and Agricultural Labourers

Province	*Depressed classes*		*Agricultural labourers*
	Numbers in millions	*Proportion to total population*	*Proportion to Agricultural population*
United Provinces	12.0	26	22
Bengal	11.5	24	33
Central Provinces	3.3	24	52
Madras	6.5	15	53
Bihar and Orissa	5.0	14	35
Punjab	2.8	13	14
Assam	1.0	13	25
Bombay	1.5	8	57

Sources: The data concerning depressed classes from the *Report of the Indian Statutory Commission* (1930), vol. I, pp. 40–1; the Commission stated that the figures are 'fairly accurate' for Madras, Bombay and the C.P.; but 'it is otherwise in the case of Bengal, the UP, and Bihar and Orissa'. In the case of Assam, they are largely 'conjectural'. The data on agricultural labourers are taken from Table 2.

The land settlements in Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa in general were completed by the end of the eighteenth century; in the United Provinces and the Punjab, however, they were not completed by even as late as 1850. Consequently, traditional forms of agrarian society disintegrated much earlier in Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa than in the United Provinces and the Punjab. In 1899, Baden-Powell pointed out that in Bengal 'the village organization has almost completely decayed', [35] whereas for the Punjab he stated that 'generally speaking, at the present day the tribal constitution of the agrarian society is more prominent in the Punjab than it is elsewhere.' [36] It should be added that the smaller proportion of agricultural labourers in the Great North is also likely to have been due partly to the opportunities, especially in the Punjab, of extensive cultivation by having more land brought under the plough and of intensive cultivation by the development of a vast network of canals and partly to an alternative outlet of employment in

the service of the British Indian army, nearly half of which was recruited from the Punjab. [37]

Thus, the transferability of a peasant's soil and his consequent dispossession together with the rate of disintegration of the older form of agrarian society make it possible, *only in broad outline,* to understand the rapid increase in the class of agricultural labourers in India as a whole as well as in its various regions.

IV

Now, we shall proceed to examine the types of agricultural labourers. For the purpose of better understanding the ladder of social relationships, four major types, with considerable overlapping, which is inevitable in a dynamic society, may be found to have evolved: (1) bonded or semi-free labourers; (2) dwarf-holding labourers, who, owing to insufficiency of income from their major occupations, such as cultivation or handicrafts, are forced to resort to part-time agricultural labour as a subsidiary occupation; (3) under-employed labourers, whose only occupation is agricultural labour, but who are unable to find full-time employment; and (4) full-time 'free' wage labourers.

On the lowest step of the ladder stand the semi-free or bonded labourers. The dwarf-holding labourers on the second step occupy the position to which bonded labourers, through acquiring a strip of land to cultivate as tenants, try to rise, or to which persons from other occupations 'sink' on account of the ruin of their once full-time occupation. This second step is thus either a point of 'elevation' from the lowest stage or a point where outsiders enter the class of agricultural labourers, thus constituting a reserve for the third or the fourth types. If their tenuous hold over their old occupations is weakened further, they 'rise' to the third step where agricultural labour becomes their prime occupation, even though it is insufficient to provide them full-time employment. The moment they find full-time employment, they climb to the fourth or the highest stage of the ladder. It should not be imagined that there is only one-way, that is, upward, traffic on this ladder.

The primary concern of the ensuing discussion will be to indicate, in broad outline, what proportion of the agricultural labour force is to be found at each of these stages and to show that, even though all these types coexist in all parts of India, certain types predominate in certain regions; at this stage, space does not permit us to go into a general description of their living and working conditions, methods of receiving remuneration, etc.

1. Bonded or Semi-Free Labourers

In the economic literature dealing with agricultural labourers, this class has been generally designated as 'agrarian serfs'. [38] It is true that such labourers, though free *de jure,* work under conditions which resemble those of serfdom and, in some cases, of slavery. It should be pointed out, however, that freedom is not denied them through the exercise of force by feudal aristocrats, as was the case with feudal serfs. Neither are they like the Greek or the Roman slaves, who were largely prisoners, captured from defeated armies or conquered territories; nor are they like the African slaves, who were turned into an article of trade by ruthless man-hunting expeditions. These differences make it necessary to examine the nature of their bondage and its causes in somewhat greater detail.

It is generally agreed that the *immediate* cause of acceptance of such bondage in India at present is the need on the part of labourers to secure advances of money. [39] Thus what appears to be an immediate cause is monetary and not so much the combined sanctions of custom, tradition, and personal power of the master. The relationship between the labourer and the master should not have been, under normal conditions, different from that of a debtor and a creditor. The reasons for the present bondage, however, are to be found in the particular evolution of Indian society in the last century and a half, during which the would-be debtor has become so desperate and the creditor so exacting that what would have normally been a free and legally equal position between two equal parties, mutually executing a contract of debit and credit, has, in reality, turned into a status of virtual slavery for

the former and absolute dominance by the latter. Since a monetary loan is the characteristic of the bonded labour system, it should be distinguished very sharply from slavery or feudal serfdom. This type of 'monetary bonded labour' could not have existed in the essentially non-monetary economy of pre-nineteenth-century India.

In this earlier society, there were menials and domestic servants whose subsistence was guaranteed by an allotment of certain acres of land, or by granting them the claim to a certain proportion of the produce of each cultivator. [40] These traditional arrangements of guaranteed subsistence were considerably weakened during the period of disintegration of village communities; the displaced menials, in the absence of alternative occupation, were forced to seek *some* form of guaranteed subsistence. It was this compulsion that forced the menials to accept bondage. The advance of money, for marriage or any other purpose, was more in the nature of a mutual recognition that the system of bondage was approved by both parties. To say, therefore, that marriage, and the advance of money which is generally used for it, are the cause of the institution of bonded labour is like saying that the exchange of wedding rings between a man and a woman is the cause of their marriage. [41]

Thus, the disintegration of the village communities brought about the 'liberation' of depressed classes from the *traditional* self-perpetuating form of bondage; but, in the process, it destroyed the basis of guaranteed livelihood. Owing to the absence of alternative means of subsistence, they were forced to accept even the worst conditions of work for securing a livelihood. The relationship thus evolved was a *new* form of bondage. The traditional serfs were 'liberated' to be re-enserfed. As Professors Thomas and Ramakrishnan remarked: 'Unemployment and under-employment have grown so serious that serfdom is not so much feared as the lack of any certain means of livelihood.' [42] Such an analysis of the nature of bondage leads us to the conclusion that *the greater the opportunities of earning a livelihood without accepting bondage, the smaller the basis for the existence of the system of bonded labour,* despite the continuation of marriages and at times of borrowing

money for marriages. This conclusion is borne out by the fact that emigration to plantations or other industries, that is, seeking alternative avenues of occupation, is leading to a breakdown of this system. [43]

It is not very easy to be very precise about the regional preponderance or the actual numbers of bonded labourers. All the existing accounts describing this system, however, indicate that it is generally more prevalent in certain parts of southern and central India, that is in the Southern Triangle and in Bihar and Orissa, where the proportion of agricultural labourers is very large. On the whole, the bonded labour system as generally described, even though it may exist in some form, is not much prevalent in Bengal, UP, Punjab and the NWFP, that is, where the proportion of agricultural labourers is relatively much lower. Thus, *the system of bonded labour is prevalent precisely in those regions where, due to a much larger proportion of landless labourers, opportunities of securing a livelihood are scarcer.* [44]

The actual number of bonded or semi-free labourers is not easy to determine. The 1921 census returns gave separate data for agricultural labourers (farm servants) who were hired on a more or less longterm basis; these formed nearly one-seventh of the total number of agricultural labourers. [45] Considering that the system of bonded labour was to be found largely in certain parts of South and Central India, it may be safely assumed that nearly half of these farm servants, or one-fourteenth of all agricultural labourers, were bonded labourers. On this basis, one may conclude that the number of bonded labourers in 1931 was not more than three million. Bearing their small number in mind, it should be clear that whatever significance they have in the literature on agrarian economy is clearly not due to their numbers, but to the manner in which their existence indicates the re-enserfment of a certain section of the agricultural population under the conditions of 'under-developed' or, more precisely speaking, arrested economy in India.

2. Dwarf-Holding Labourers

There is a large body of persons who have not been classified as agricultural labourers in the Census Report; however, in reality, their

status is either indistinguishable from that of labourers or, at least, owing to an inadequate income from their own occupation, they have to seek work on fields as a subsidiary occupation. All petty cultivators, generally cultivating less than five acres of land, come under this category; in contrast to landless labourers, they are 'dwarf-holding' labourers. As the Census Report of 1901 stated, the petty cultivator is 'a tenant, a farm-servant and a field labourer all rolled into one.' [46] Among these petty cultivators, there are some whom it is hard to distinguish from agricultural labourers. The Royal Commission on Agriculture remarked that 'in many cases, the tiller of land is subject to conditions which make his status approach much more closely to that of a labourer than an independent cultivator.' [47] The *bargadars* in Bengal, who generally pay one-half of the produce to the lessor, were expressly declared by the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1928 to be agricultural labourers. [48]

In the zamindari regions, this reduction of the cultivators to the status of agricultural labourers was brought about by the growth of a high degree of sub-indentation between the original zamindari and the final cultivator. 'Zamindars, lessees, sub-lessees, mortgages and sub-mortgages', noted the *Cambridge History of India,* 'increased and multiplied. In village after village layers of middlemen interposed between the cultivators and the Zamindars.' [49] The Indian Statutory Commission of 1928 found cases where the number of intermediaries, each of them fattening at the expense of the cultivators, exceeded fifty. [50] The results underlying this process were emphasized by the Royal Commission in these words: 'The lack of alternative means of securing a living, the difficulty of finding any avenue of escape . . . combine to force the cultivator to grow food *wherever he can and on whatever terms he can*.' [51]

It was the weakness of the tenant's position that forced him to cling to land on any terms. This context formed a fertile ground for the rapid growth of share-cropping. In an important article in the *American Sociological Review,* Ramakrishna Mukerjee has proved that the system

of share-cropping gave the absentee landlords a greater margin of profit than what they would have got by employing landless labourers. [52] The tendency, therefore, was not toward an intensive exploitation *of the soil,* but toward that of the *tenant on the soil.*

It is difficult to determine the actual number of petty cultivators in India. This difficulty is increased by the fact that owing to differences in fertility of the soil, irrigation, etc., there is little precision in the concept of a dwarf-holding in India. Since, however, the average unit of cultivation in India is nearly five acres, a small patch indeed, we have regarded all farmers cultivating less than five acres as dwarf-holders. For the Punjab, the Royal Commission on Agriculture summarized the position of units of cultivation thus: 22.5 per cent of the farmers cultivated 1 acre or less, 15.4 per cent between one and 2.5 acres, 17.9 per cent between 2.5 and 5 acres, and 20.5 per cent between 5 and 10 acres. [53] Thus, more than half of the holdings were below 5 acres. We have no such data on units of cultivation for other parts of India. However, if this was the situation in the Punjab where the average number of acres per cultivator was 8.8, it is not difficult to see that the extent of dwarf-holding is bound to be much greater in Madras, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, UP, and Assam, where the average number of acres per cultivator is smaller than in the Punjab. According to the estimates of the Famine Enquiry Commission of 1944–5, 64 per cent or nearly two-thirds of the farmers in Bengal cultivated less than 5 acres. [54] On this basis, one can safely conclude that *more than half the farmers in India cultivate less than 5 acres, that is, are dwarf-holders.* [55] A very large proportion of these are tenants-at-will and share-croppers.

Concerning regional differences, it is clear that we find proportionately more tenants-at-will and share-croppers where there are fewer landless labourers, as for example in Bengal, Bihar, the UP, and the Punjab. In other words, the *landless labourer of the raiyatwari region (Southern Triangle) had the dwarf-holding share-cropper and tenant-at- will as his counterpart in the zamindari and mahalwari regions.* In the former, the cultivator was expropriated *from* the land; in the latter he was exploited *on* the land. Thus, it appears that though

there are distinct regional differences in India if landless *labourers* are taken into consideration (see Table 2), these differences do not seem to be as sharp if all landless *persons* (both landless labourers and tenants-at-will who have *no* right to land) are taken into account.

There are no adequate figures on the extent of land cultivated by tenants-at-will, most of whom are share-croppers. The Bengal Land Revenue Commission estimated that about one-fifth of the land in Bengal was cultivated under the *barga* or share-cropping system. [56] In a number of districts, however, as much as a third of the land was reported to be cultivated under the barga system. [57] On the basis of an extensive sample survey by the Indian Statistical Institute, Ambica Ghosh found that the area under share-cropping in 1945–6 was nearly 25 per cent instead of 20 per cent as in 1938; more than 35 per cent of cultivators were involved in the system of share-cropping. [58] For Bihar, Sir Manilal and Anjaria estimated that 20 per cent of the sown area was cultivated by share-croppers. [59] According to the estimates of the Bengal Land Revenue Commission, nearly half of the cultivators of the Punjab are tenants-at-will and share-croppers. [60] From the preceding evidence, it may be safely assumed that between a third and half of all these cultivators are dwarf-holding tenants-at-will and, or sharecroppers, that is, dwarf-holding labourers.

3. Under-Employed Landless Labourers

We have already discussed the cases of bonded or semi-free labourers who are *tied to landowners* and the dwarf-holding labourers who are *tied to land*; in both cases, the most important cause in their evolution as specific types was the lack of alternative means of employment under the condition of the 'arrested' economic development of India. When their tenuous ties with the landowners or land are broken, they are pushed into the type which we have called the underemployed landless labourers. [61] Thus, they are 'liberated' from bondage to be condemned to almost certain starvation. As Professors Thomas and Ramakrishnan

rightly observed: 'Their independence is thus of little material value; it is an insufficient compensation for the loss of a sheltered existence.' [62]

These labourers form an amorphous mass of a floating reserve migrating from place to place in search of work, be it on the farms during crop seasons, or on the plantations, or in industries or any kind of odd jobs. The Royal Commission on Agriculture noted that 75 per cent of the labour employed in 15 large sugar mills in Bihar and Orissa was composed of such migratory labourers. [63] Even though Bengal is one of the most densely populated provinces in India, 'it employs many thousands of labourers from the Santhal Parganas of Bihar and the United Provinces . . . for a big jute crop, Biharis are also employed in reaping the crop.' [64] Similarly, in the wheat and cotton tracts of the Central Provinces, labourers come from the north-east and the south-west. In Madras, thousands move every year from Vizagapattam, from the uplands of Godawari, Kistna, and Guntur to the lands watered by the Godawari. [65] These migrant labourers receive remuneration in kind or cash; there is, however, a definite tendency to replace grain wages by cash. [66]

It is not difficult to understand why this type of labourers is generally underemployed. Since most of the cultivators are small cultivators, they do not generally need hired help, except at the time of harvesting. Thus, it is only during harvesting that most of these labourers are employed; this period extends from three to four months. For the rest of the year, they are under-employed, or completely unemployed.

The monotonous emphasis on the inadequacy of statistical information needs no reiteration here. It was indicated above that nearly one-seventh of the total number of agricultural labourers were employed more or less on a long term basis (both as bonded as well as 'free' wage labourers); it follows, therefore, that the rest are in this category of underemployed labourers. Thus, nearly 35 million of all agricultural labourers belonged to this type in 1931. The regions where this type is most prevalent can be only suggested. Obviously, they predominate in the Southern Triangle, the land of the landless labourers

par excellence; it is no coincidence, therefore, that the major currents of seasonal migration originate here and in Bihar.

4. Full-Time 'Fee' Wage Labourers

This type of labourer is composed of two categories: plantation labourers employed by plantation owners, and employees of other capitalistic and well-to-do farmers. Unlike the employers of other types, the employers of this type are capitalistic and well-to-do farmers whose main interest in cultivation is to secure profits rather than to live on rents from the land.

Since most of the plantations were situated in very thinly populated areas, it was at first very difficult to attract a sufficient number of labourers. Consequently, planters, most of them British, resorted to a system of recruitment about which W Nassau Less rightly remarked that 'the horrors of the slave trade pale before the horrors of the coolie trade of Assam and Cachar in years 1861–62.' [67] The system changed little during the following years. A Commission appointed by the British Trade Union Congress trenchantly remarked in 1928 that 'in Assam tea, the sweat, hunger and despair of a million Indians enter year by year'. [68] The Report of the recent Labour Investigation Committee showed that the position, even as late as 1946, was very little different. [69]

The continued use of the old penal contract forms or of new forms resembling them, the virtual prohibition of labourers' contact with the outside world, the collusion between planters in the form of 'labour rules', and the absence of any strong organization on the part of these labourers combine to impose such restrictions on them that, in effect, their position becomes almost indistinguishable from that of the bonded or semi-free labourers. [70] It is not surprising, therefore, that this type of labourer has been characterized as a kind of serf or bonded labourer. [71] The labourers' actual working conditions undoubtedly tend to justify such a view. Nevertheless, there are strong reasons for differentiating them sharply from bonded or semi-free labourers.

First of all, they are employed by capitalist farmers. Secondly, unlike bonded labourers, they are paid mainly in cash. Thirdly, restrictions on these labourers are partly due to the fact that the British government of the country not only overlooked but even encouraged such dominance of plantation owners who were mostly British. As the Labour Investigation Committee itself warned: 'The plantation industry can hardly hope to continue much longer in its present happy position in which it is neither controlled by government, nor limited by the activities of the trade unions.' [72] Finally, in sharp contrast to the bonded labourers who work for separate masters, the plantation labourers, like other factory workers, work together in thousands in close contact with each other. Even though the present restrictions on them make it nearly meaningless to call them free labourers, there is little doubt that the objective conditions under which they work cannot but create a situation in which they, backed by a growing trade union organization among them, will soon be able to assert their freedom—an opportunity which is more remote for the bonded labourers. For these reasons, it is considered proper and necessary to classify the plantation labourers as 'free' labourers.

The numerical size and regional location of this type are not difficult to determine. The Labour Investigation Committee gave a figure of 1.1 million for them in 1946. [73] The regional location needs little explanation here, for it is governed not by any historical, economic or social factors, but by climatic and soil requirements. It is important, however, to note that the areas from which these labourers are drawn have the largest concentration of bonded and underemployed labourers.

In the second category of this type of 'free' wage labourers are included other agricultural labourers who are employed by well-to-do and capitalist farmers on a more or less long-term basis. Up to now, very little attention has been given to a study of the development of capitalist agriculture, which though unlikely to extend to any sizeable proportion of the total area cultivated in India, does represent, even in an embryonic stage, a highly significant phenomenon within the agrarian society and thus merits greater study.

In a study of the rural economy of British Gujarat, M.B. Desai found that, in 1931–2, 7.9 per cent of the area was cultivated with the help of labourers hired on a long-term basis; in 1941–2, it fell to only 5.8 per cent. [74] Similarly, Professors Thomas and Ramakrishnan point out for Madras that the cultivation 'with the aid of farm-servants, which was in vogue in 1916–17, has been slowly giving way to lands on share or fixed rents.' [75] On the basis of a wide sample survey in Bengal, Ambica Ghosh disclosed that only 5.1 per cent of the land surveyed was cultivated by fully hired labourers. [76] The above evidence indicates that if less than 6 per cent of the land in Gujarat, which is among the most prosperous agricultural regions in India, was cultivated by full-time hired labourers, it is unlikely that for India as a whole more than 5 per cent of land would be cultivated by this type of labourer. Since the unit of cultivation in such cases is bound to be larger than average, it is reasonable to suppose that capitalist farmers are much less than 5 per cent of total cultivators, probably between 1 and 2 per cent.

As pointed out earlier, one-seventh of all agricultural labourers were calculated to be employed on a long-term basis; somewhat less than half of them, or nearly three million, were bonded labourers. Therefore, the number of full-time free wage labourers in 1931 may be placed somewhere between three and four million. The places where this type predominates can only be suggested. They are likely to be found in areas supplying dairy products, fruits, vegetables, and other such products to cities and big towns, or where commercial crops such as tea, coffee, sugar, cotton, jute, tobacoo, etc., are grown, or where modern methods of irrigation have been developed.

V

We have briefly reviewed the process of the manifest disintegration of the traditional form of agrarian society in India. The most striking end result of this dramatic change is the emergence of a distinct and large class of landless labourers, whose proportion to the agricultural population rose from about 13 per cent in the last decade of the nineteenth century to 38 per cent in 1931, that is, it virtually tripled.

For a proper understanding of the contemporary agrarian society, more detailed information about its social composition is necessary. Notwithstanding this serious limitation, the data presented in Table 4 throw considerable light on the social pyramid in the agrarian society, especially at its base.

For those who have conceived of India as a land of individualistic peasant proprietors, it would be a rude shock to find that over 70 per cent of the agricultural population have *no right* to land; that nearly two-fifths of it are landless labourers and a third of it are dwarf-holding labourers both of whom struggle to escape absolute starvation by working under serf-like conditions on the lands owned by a small number of large land-holders. No wonder that the cultivators in India are poor and that the per acre productivity is very low and falling. In a social context wherein exploitation of *persons,* desperately seeking to subsist, is placed at a higher premium than that of the *soil* itself, widespread emergence of improved methods of cultivation is clearly out of the question.

Table 4

The Composition of the Agrarian Society in India, 1931

Item	*Number in million*	*Per cent*
A. *Social Composition*:		
Total agricultural working population of which	111	100.0
I. Rent receivers	4	3.6
II. Cultivating more than five acres of which	28	25.3
(a) Owner cultivators	18	16.3
(b) Tenant cultivators	10	9.0
III. Dwarf-holding labourers of which	37	33.3
(a) Petty proprietors	10	9.0
(b) Tenants-at-will and share-croppers	27	24.3
IV. Landless labourers of which	42	37.8
(a) Bonded labourers	3	2.7
(b) Under-employed labourers	35	31.5
(c) Full-time 'free' wage labourers	4	3.6
B. *Those with no rights to land*:		
Total under II(b), III(b), and IV	79	71.1

Sources: 1931 data in Table 1. The distribution of figures on owner cultivators and tenant cultivators between groups II and III here is estimated on the basis of the evidence and conclusions of the section dealing with dwarf-holding labourers.

The rural structure of the older India has given way; no return to it seems possible. This profound transformation of the older India, perhaps the most thoroughgoing social change in India's long history, underlines the day-to-day scene in the contemporary Republic of India and in Pakistan and helps to attain some meaningful understanding of the problems and tasks they face in the future. [77]

2

Caste and Landlessness in South India*

DHARMA KUMAR

In 1956 there were 16.3 million agricultural labour households in India, roughly one out of three for Indian agriculture as a whole. [1] Their number has been rapidly increasing; in 1900 only 12 per cent of the agricultural population were landless labourers. [2] It is tempting to see the creation of this huge landless class as yet another verification of a general theory of development which seems to apply to Japan and to much of South East Asia, as well as to a great deal of Western experience. Such a theory would explain the growth of this class in terms of the weakening of village communities, the breaking down of traditional patterns of land tenure, the spreading of indebtedness and the consequent dispossession of the peasantry, and it would find the chief cause of these changes in the monetization of the economy.

In India there is the further temptation to see behind every modern development the influence of British innovations; and this seems as plausible about the growth of landless labour as it does about the fluctuations of the rupee. It is known that landlessness on this scale did exist under the Moguls; from this it is a short step to the conclusion that the creation of this landless class was not only contemporaneous with British rule, but that it was the inevitable result of that rule. Thus the

British imposed heavy land dues, which were collected more efficiently than under previous rulers, and they collected them in cash. Peasants could be evicted for non-payment of this land revenue. With changes in the legal system, their land became good security for debt, and the moneylender was enabled to take it over in cases of default.

Such a view is generally accepted by historians of modern India. [3] To quote only one example:

> . . . there is a consensus of opinion that, in pre-nineteenth century India, there was no noticeably large class of agricultural labourers . . . The large class of agricultural labourers represents a new form of social relationships that emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in India . . . That in the course of about a hundred years, the whole social basis of a traditional society which had outlived so many previous invaders, could be so completely smashed by a handful of adventurers from an island in the far-off Atlantic and by a few of their native allies, in a country divided from the place of their birth by half the globe; that of its cultivators and artisans one-third could be turned into landless labourers and one half into petty cultivators, tenants-at-will and share croppers are accomplishments for which one would look in vain for a parallel in the whole history of mankind. [4]

Of course it is difficult to agree or to disagree with any statement in which a class represents a form of social relationship, but the view behind this bizarre logic—that the whole structure of Indian society was altered under British rule—commands wide agreement. The view has been stereotyped that before the British seized power, the typical Indian village was self-sufficient, consisting mainly of small peasants tilling their own land. This is the picture drawn by Maine and Elphinstone, and then taken over by Marx, who went on to show that the destruction of this system—a destruction he regarded as necessary—had been brought about by British imperialism. [5] Marx was here assuming that native institutions could not survive the coming of the British, and that none of the changes in them have been self-generated; and oddly enough he borrowed this assumption from the propaganda

of the imperialists themselves, who justified their rule by claiming to be the active agents of change in stagnant societies. But it is far from being self-evident that Indian institutions were as inert and malleable, and that European rulers were as free to mould them, as this view implies.

So useful is the theory that the British created an agricultural proletariat that its truth is taken for granted. But if it should turn out that at the beginning of British rule in 1800 agricultural labourers formed as large a part of the agricultural population as they did in 1900, and that the great growth of this class took place during the twentieth century, after more than one hundred years of the Raj, then clearly the theory would be demolished.

But this is very difficult to establish. The first all-India census was not taken until 1871, [6] and although demographical information was collected for some parts of India in earlier years, the data are defective and full of confusions, particularly about occupational details. But there is an indirect way of attacking the problem. It is derived from the connection between caste and occupation. If it can be established that certain castes were traditionally agricultural labourers, then from the caste data available from 1871 onwards, it is possible by extrapolation to estimate the size of the group at the beginning of the century. Further, many of these labourers were hereditary serfs (a fact which strengthens the relationship between caste and occupation), large numbers of whom could be sold and mortgaged. Whether their status was precisely that of slaves or serfs was far from clear to the British administrators, but the fact of servitude was patent. This attracted the attention of the anti-slavery movement in England, a pressure group so strong that it forced the administrators into submitting a series of reports on 'slavery' in India. For the most part, these reports were concerned with the legal disabilities of dependent status, but they also contain information about the social and economic position of the bondsmen and above all about their numbers. These data can be used as a check on the estimates about the numbers of the agricultural labourers at the opening of the century which are derivable from the census. Such estimates can be neither firm

nor precise, but they are a great deal firmer and more precise than the vague generalizations that have been made hitherto.

To work out estimates for the whole of India would involve detailed studies of the variations in caste, land tenures, and so on throughout the subcontinent. But to disprove the general theory, it is not necessary to go so far. All that is needed is to take the region which has been viewed as best illustrating the theory, the Madras Presidency in South India. Here was a region where by 1956 the proportion of agricultural labour to total population had grown to be one of the highest in the country. Here too, the caste system was particularly rigid, and so presumably was the connection between caste and occupation. In Madras the effects of monetization should have been seen at their sharpest, for here the British collected the highest rate of land revenue, and did so in cash. For all these reasons, the following study of agricultural labour will concentrate on Madras.

II

After it had been rounded off by conquest and cession, the Madras Presidency covered southern India between 8°S. and 16°S., with an outlying spur (the districts of Godavari, Kistna, Vizagapatam, and Ganjam) stretching towards the north-east. But leaving aside this rough country, the bulk of the Presidency falls into three physical groups: the strip of land between the Indian Ocean and the Western Ghats (the districts of South Kanara, Malabar, and Nilgiri), the strip between the Bay of Bengal and the Eastern Ghats (the districts of Tinnevelly, Tanjore, South Arcot, Madura, Chinglepet, and Nellore), and the high land between these coastal belts (the districts of Coimbatore, Salem, North Arcot, Trichinopoly, Cuddapah, Kurnool, Anantapur, and Bellary). Among these twenty-one districts these were important differences. The west coast enjoys a monsoon rainfall so lavish that double and triple cropping is common in Malabar and South Kanara. On the east coast only Tanjore has a bountiful supply, while in the centre the rainfall is both scanty and capricious. As a second important difference, the caste system was most rigorous on the west coast, and in particular in Malabar; though still severe, it was less rigorous in the

nine south-eastern districts which were Tamil; and it was most relaxed in the nine Telugu-speaking districts of the north-east. Far and away the largest crops grown in the Presidency were cereals (rice, *cholam, cambu,* and *ragi),* although vegetable gardens existed everywhere. During the nineteenth century there were experiments with such cash crops as cotton, indigo, and cinchona. The quantity of rainfall and the quality of soil have dominated all this, and we must expect to find vast disparities of productivity between the west coast and Tanjore on the one hand, and the poor lands of the interior on the other. We must also expect these disparities to have affected the agrarian structure of such districts.

By 1801 the Madras Presidency had taken the shape it was to keep with minor changes until independence, but there had been forty years of fighting before the British reorganization of South India got under way. The fact is important, for it meant that the new administrators inherited a country in deep social disorder. In agrarian terms it meant that the land they were going to rule had already been relentlessly assessed and taxed, and that the registers of land rights, revenue liabilities, and the like were in hopeless confusion.

For us there is no need to plunge into the jungle of land tenures through which the early British administrators had to hack their way. The important point is that they did not find a simple system of self-sufficient peasants paying land revenue to the state, but a complex pattern of rights to ownership, occupation, and shares in the produce of the land. In the first place, these included the rights of the zamindars, originally revenue collectors under the Moguls, to a share of the land revenue payable to the state. Secondly, another share of that revenue might be alienated to individuals for service rendered, or to institutions, notably to the temples. [7] Thirdly, there were varying degrees of private ownership, including the right to sell and mortgage land, and to evict tenants. These were vested in the *janmis* of Malabar, the *mulawargadars* of Kanara, and the *mirasdars* of the Tamil areas, and under them there might be occupancy tenants or tenants-at-will. [8] In several respects the British altered the old systems of land tenures, such as by giving the zamindars ownership rights they had not previously possessed; but

these were less important than the cases in which they ratified the status quo. By more or less recognizing the pretensions of the janmis, mulawargadars, and mirasdars, they put the power of the law behind private ownership.

But for our purposes, the pattern of actual land holdings around 1800 is an issue of greater importance than the legal system of tenures. Unfortunately, there is much less information about it. But what evidence there is seems to show that *latifundia* employing large numbers of labourers did not exist at this time. Big landowners, such as the great zamindars, rented out their land: if they had any home farms, these were relatively small. There are only two recorded instances of landlords owning large numbers of slaves. [9] Yet there were many farmers, prosperous by the standards of the time, with holdings big enough to need between five and fifty serfs or hired labourers. This was particularly the case in the fertile lands of Malabar and Kanara, as well as in the better irrigated lands in the Tamil districts. Their demand for labour was reinforced by the caste system, for Brahmins were not permitted to perform manual labour, [10] and a significant proportion of the landowners were Brahmins. But all in all, it has to be admitted that the data on the size of holdings and the agrarian structure at the beginning of the nineteenth century are too scanty to prove or disprove in themselves the existence of landless labour. They can be used only to reinforce inferences drawn from other sources.

III

So the best method of estimating the numbers of landless labourers early in the nineteenth century seems to lie in working from the caste data, on the assumption that members of certain castes were hereditary agricultural labourers. This assumption is strengthened by the servile status of members of these castes, a status frequently approaching agrestic slavery.

But ‘slavery’ and ‘serfdom’ are ambiguous terms to apply in South India. The ‘ideal type’ of slave would be not only a factor of production, but also a freely marketable commodity (as in the developed cash crop

economies of the West Indies and the American South). At the other end of the scale would be the domestic slave, who had at the most a small role to play in production, and whose rights were guarded by contiguity with his master (as in Ashanti or Northern Nigeria). South Indian slavery belongs to neither of these types. [11] Here the slave played a highly important part in production, but he enjoyed certain admitted rights, which accrued to him from his caste. [12] Although this group as a whole lay at the bottom of the caste ladder, there were further gradations inside it, each sub-group having its firmly articulated rights and disabilities.

It was these distinctions which baffled the British administrators on whom we have to depend for most of our information. Faced with these groups, which were clearly in some degree or other of servitude, they fell back on ancient terms such as 'allodial slave of the soil', 'agricultural serf', 'villein' or '*adscriptus glebae*'. The result was a palimpsest of definitions, none of which fitted South Indian conditions. Because of the ambiguities inherent in these European terms, in what follows the local names will be used as far as possible. This means that each of the three main linguistic regions must be described separately since the forms and degrees of servitude were very different in all three of them. In descending order of the rigour of this servitude, we shall examine first the west coast districts (Malabar and South Kanara), then the Tamil districts (Tinnevelly, Madura, Trichinopoly, Coimbatore, Salem, Chinglepet, North and South Arcot), and lastly the Telugu and northern districts (Bellary, Anantapur, Kurnool, Nellore, Cuddapah, Kistna, Godavari, Vizagapatam, and Ganjam).

West Coast Districts

Almost every administrator who went to Malabar in the early nineteenth century reported on the rigour of the slavery and the wretchedness of the slaves. [13] Thus in 1801 Buchanan remarked that in South Malabar 'by far the greater part of the labour in the fields is performed by slaves, or *churmar*. These are the absolute property of their Devarus or lords and may be employed in any work that their

master please. They are not attached to the soil but may be sold or transferred in any manner that the master thinks fit. Only husband and wife can be sold but children may be separated from their parents and brothers from their sisters.' [14] Buchanan's term *churmar,* or more properly *cheru- man,* is the name of the caste that formed the bulk of the agricultural labourers. [15] Even within Malabar itself the incidence of servitude for the cheruman was not uniform but there were certainly places where they were treated almost exactly like other forms of property. For example, Buchanan mentions three modes of transferring slaves here: (i) *janmun* or sale, where the full value of the slave was given and the property entirely handed over; (ii) *kanam* or mortgage where the proprietor got a loan and a quantity of rice, to show that his property in the slave was not extinguished, but could be resumed once the loan was repaid; (iii) *pattam* or rent, where the slave was hired out for an annual sum, the hirer paying the cost of maintenance. [16] Again, when Graeme was describing still more elaborate ways of transferring slaves, in 1822, he stated that they could be mortgaged under *veerom pattam, paneyam, kanom wottee* (i.e. *otti),* and *pair*. [17] Strikingly enough, both Buchanan's and Graeme's sets of terms are identical with those used for the transfer of land either by sale or mortgage. The connection is suggestive. Not only was Malabar the district with the most rigorous caste rules in the Presidency, but here in this heavily watered and highly productive region the Brahmins and Nayars had successfully asserted rights of proprietorship over the soil. [18] Clearly, the pattern of rights over human beings had moved in the same direction of ownership: both Buchanan and Graeme concur that here slaves might be sold independently of the land. [19] Perhaps this was mitigated by the slave's retaining the residual right not to be removed far from his village; thus it was reported from North Malabar in 1812 that 'a *polliar* (puliyan) sold or transferred could not be removed out of the district, his place of nativity.' [20] But if they obtained anywhere, it was precisely in North Malabar that such restrictions on the master's power of sale were most to be expected, for there the conditions of servitude were noticeably milder. Yet here again, agricultural slavery

was widespread, and once more it was closely connected with caste. Of Wynaad in the north, Graeme remarked that 'the landed proprietors . . . are torpid to a degree; all the field work is done by slaves called *Painers* who are held in higher estimation than the slaves of the lower districts. They are admitted to the threshold of their masters' houses, and they are even employed in grinding rice for the use of the temples.' [21]

Various witnesses quote the price of slaves in various places, and this establishes a presumption that the market was fairly developed. According to Buchanan, a mature male slave cost the equivalent of £2.1*s.*6*d.* in South Malabar; in North Malabar a male might sell at anything between £0.9.6 and £1.6.8, and he might be hired out at just under 2*s.* per annum. [22] These discrepancies did not merely arise from differences of age and condition, as in other systems of slavery. Here the caste of the slave was another determinant of the price. For example, Vaughan reported that the best male slaves were sold at £6.5.0 and hired out at £0.3.9 per annum, but that the corresponding rates for cheruman were £1.4.0 and £0.1.3. [23] But bought and sold though he might be, the cheruman's residual rights saved him from being a mere commodity. Custom fixed his wages, and a master who could not pay them would sell the slave to someone who could. [24]

In South Kanara, the other important district of the West Coast, the caste system operated with much the same rigour as in Malabar. On the whole, agricultural labourers were a little freer, but they were far indeed from being free. Here too servitude was closely related to caste, and the general practice of the administrators was to use the caste term *dherd* (i.e. *dhed)* almost as a synonym for agricultural slave. But in doing so, they were blunting the subleties of the system. The Kanarese name for the agricultural labour caste was *holeya,* [25] but, as in Malabar, the generic term covered a whole hierarchy of servitudes, some of them much more complex and conditional than their European analogues. The dhed appear to have fallen into three groups. The first of these, the *mogare* or *magor,* [26] 'come nearest the description of slaves', but they fell short of it in the following respects: although they could be bought and

sold their service was conditional upon their master giving them the customary allowance of rice, cloth, etc. Should he fail to do so, in principle they could recover the balance. Should they be sold to a new master, then 'if from any real cause they have a dread of the man, their old master will generally, on being asked, keep them till he can get another purchaser. Should they be asked to leave the district of their birth, they could refuse.' For so ambiguous a status, the Collector of South Kanara devised the ambiguous definition, 'conditional servants for ever'. The second group, the *maurey dherd*', [27] were generally attached to the land; they had much the same privileges as the first group, but if the master did not give them their allowances, they had not the redress of leaving his service. Thirdly, there were the *'moondaul dherd* [28] whose wedding expenses were paid by the master, in return for which the 'slave' and his wife had to serve him and his heirs during the lifetime of the male slave. On his death, his wife and children went to the wife's brother, and had to work for the latter's master, if he had one. Never bought and sold, these *moondaul dherd* could be mortgaged by their owner. The Collector defined them as 'conditional servants on the male side for life.' [29] These divisions were based on caste; a more functional distinction was between the *kattulu* and *mannalu.* 'The former is the hereditary servitor of the family, born in servitude, and performing agricultural work for the landlord, from father to son. The *mannalu* is a serf attached to the soil and changes with it. These are usually of the *Holeya* class but in some places men of the *Hasalar* race have been entertained.' [30]

Such was the position in 1801. Later references confirm that it still held good for some decades of the nineteenth century. They also show the existence of a market for these labourers. In 1819 the Collector reported that slaves might be sold with the land or separately from it, that they might be mortgaged or hired out, and that the price of a strong male varied between 18s. and £1.19. [31] Ten years later the First Judge of the Court of Circuit mentioned 'a civil suit where a demand was made for twenty *moolumunishers* [slaves], value 50 pagodas;

without individual specification, immediately followed by a like summary demand for brute animals.' [32]

South Kanara resembles Malabar in several respects: a similar system of property in land, with the mulawargadars of South Kanara corresponding to the janmis of Malabar; a system for transferring landless labourers analogous with the system of transferring land; several types of rigorously servile status.

Tamil Districts

In the Tamil districts, the status of the various agrarian groups was less rigorously defined. The land tenures were also more confused, for there were still traces of the joint village, where the lands were held in common by the mirasdars. Although most of the original features of the joint village system had died out by the time the British assumed control, the mirasdars continued to assert what rights they could, such as their rights over the village waste. The breakdown of the system was usually accompanied by the destruction of slavery, or conversely, slavery was most pronounced where the land was still held in severalty. [33] Consequently, the first British collectors had to deal with a social structure that was still changing, and which was changing at different rates, almost from village to village. The fact of agricultural bondage was palpable. But did it amount to slavery? Or did the residual rights of the labourers raise their status? To give English names to these status groups was a task which strained the resources of the collectors' vocabulary. They defined the superior sort of dependent labourers as 'villeins' or 'serfs' (terms they never employed on the west coast). Yet the right not to be sold off the land which such terms would normally connote was not granted in all villages, and indeed it was hardly ever acknowledged unambiguously by the masters.

There were two Tamil terms which the administrators might have used: *pannaiyal,* or permanent farm servant (this term will be employed hereafter to cover all unfree labourers in the Tamil districts), and *padiyal* or hired farm servant receiving wages in kind. [34] But they preferred to use the names of the agricultural labour castes—*palli,*

pallan, and *pariah.* Indirect though it is, this is significant evidence of the functional role of caste in these districts.

It is clear that the pannaiyal were generally much better off than the dependent groups on the west coast; but it is equally plain that in some of the Tamil regions they were closer to slavery than to serfdom. There is a wealth of evidence that pannaiyal were sold and mortgaged through all nine Tamil districts. In 1819, for example, a male labourer in Tinnevelly might fetch up to Rs 30; in South Arcot (where labour was scarce) a slave family might cost between Rs 35 and Rs. 175; in Coimbatore, the 'highest price for a good slave is 50 Rupees, the price however is seldom so high.' [35] From such transfers the higher castes of bondsmen were not exempt. Pallan might be sold at prices between Rs 15/8 and Rs 35, and their services could be mortgaged as well; female pallan, on the other hand, were never sold. [36]

Whether or not a bondsman might be sold independently of the land he tilled was a convention which varied from district to district in the early decades of the nineteenth century. [37] In Coimbatore the right to sell pannaiyal in this way was 'very seldom, if ever, exercised', [38] pallan in Trichinopoly were usually sold with the land, and, should they be sold away from it, they were never taken involuntarily from their villages. [39] In 1819 the Collector of Tinnevelly reported that it was usual for 'slaves to be sold or mortgaged either with the land or separately . . . there is no particular rule'; but seventeen years later it would seem that there was, and that now pallan normally went only with the land. [40] There was a smaller evolution in Tanjore. In 1819 the Collector wrote that 'I do not find that the system of slaves attached to the soil, and transferable by purchase, as an appendage to the land, obtains here'; but in 1836 a judge in that district could report that pallan has been sued for as transferable both with and without the land. [41] In Madura, where slavery was in decline, it was stated in 1836 that the labourers might be sold only with their own consent: [42] but in Chinglepet, 'these persons are not in any way attached to the land but

are the property of the individual and may by him be called away . . .', and here the system was losing its rigour by 1836. [43]

It may be that the issue was often decided by the power of the mirasdar. Labourers in whom the whole village held joint property could not be sold separately from the land; their duty was to work for each mirasdar in turn, for a period proportionate to his share in the village lands. [44] But where a labourer was held personally by a mirasdar, he could be sold without reference to the land. By the early nineteenth century, mirasdars were pressing their rights. As the Collector in South Arcot reported in 1819, 'in some villages it is known mirasdars have advanced pretensions to possess an equal property of the slaves with their share of the village.' [45]

Whatever their status in principle, for the free labourers too, liberty was a relative affair. These padiyal were hired for very long periods, and they could be enchained by debt to one master. Buchanan noted at Coimbatore, for example, that 'the hinds, or servants hired . . . by the farmers are here called *Puddial* . . . They sometimes bind themselves for a number of years, in which case the master advances money for their marriage expenses, and deducts so much from their monthly pay, until he is repaid.' [46] Probably they were often in debt, the Collector of Chinglepet stating in 1819, for instance, that the free labourers frequently borrowed money for house-building, marriages, or other heavy expenditure. [47] Moreover, there were hereditary relationships between masters and men, and indeed it was not unknown for the descendants of former labourers to claim work as a right from the descendants of former employers. After all, for the free, as for the unfree, there were certain advantages about servitude; from one point of view, an obligation to work could be construed as a right to employment. Finally, free labourers resembled some of the unfree in having come from the same labouring caste of pallan. [48]

The modes of dependence in the Tamil districts during the early nineteenth century spanned a wide range, from near-freedom to near-slavery. Fundamentally, this was because the agrarian structure of

Tamilnad was still in the process of transition. But though many things had changed, the connection between occupational status and caste was still firm.

Telugu District

Since it was in this region (the modern Andhra) that Muslim overlordship had been firmest, it is to be expected that those forms of servitude closely connected with caste would be milder here than in other parts of South India. Domestic slavery was fairly common, [49] and a slave trade was fairly brisk in the early nineteenth century, [50] but agrarian slavery or serfdom was rare. Indeed, the Board of Revenue went so far as to say in 1818 that here the agricultural labourers were free. But this was putting it too strongly, for they worked on contracts and were bound to the village until their time was up; moreover, they generally stayed in these villages, their descendants often remaining attached to the same families. [51] In any case, the information sent in by the collectors in 1819 did something to quench the Board's optimism. In Masulipatam, 'the far greater proportion of the more substantial ryots have slaves, or rather they have men whose families have been in the employment of their ancestors from time immemorial, and whose services they have a right to enforce.' [52] In 1839 this description became more precise. It was then reported that while 'slavery in the usual acceptation of the word' did not exist, there were three categories of dependants who were usually called slaves: the servants of the zamindars *(khasaloo),* the servants of the Muslims (*goolam*), and finally the *paulaloo,* who were pariahs attached to the ryots or cultivators. These paulaloo were not saleable, but when the land was sold, they went with it. They might not desert their master, or if they did, he could claim them back. 'To these persons, however, although they live in a state of perpetual servitude to their masters, the term of "hereditary servants" might be more properly applied, as they are neither saleable nor is the authority of the masters legally recognised.' [53]

With such ambiguities of status, it is not surprising that the administrators could not agree among themselves whether servitude

existed. In 1836 the officials of Cuddapah and Nellore flatly denied that there was slavery in their districts, [54] and it was said to be very mild in Guntur. Yet that same year the collectors of Rajahmundry and Ganjam were writing of the 'voluntary servitude of the slaves' and 'slavery of the mildest description', similar to that obtaining in Masulipatam. In fact, it is clear enough that the Masulipatam conditions approached the servitude of the Tamil districts, and probable enough that the Masulipatam type of bondage extended to the neighbouring Telugu regions. After all, they had much in common—the land tenures and the farming methods were similar. So it seems a fair inference that, in the neighbouring parts of Rajahmundry and Guntur at least, and possibly further afield, there was a class of farm labourers with much the same degree of dependence as those in Masulipatam. And indeed, the description of the slaves in Rajahmundry, who are said to form a distinct class, considered to be impure, and . . . unfit for domestic service, leads to the inference that they are . . . *Paria* agrestic slaves.' [55]

Whatever the nature of this servitude, there can be no doubt that in the Telugu districts it was less widespread than in Tamilnad, and that only very rarely did it approach the rigour of servile status further to the south. But equally there can be no doubt that it was correlated with landlessness and correlated with caste.

It may be that some of the confusion about South Indian slavery is merely semantic; on the other hand, much of it must surely spring from the evolution of the agrarian structure itself. [56] Yet out of this confusion three clear findings emerge. Servile labourers in varying degrees of dependence existed throughout the Madras Presidency during the early nineteenth century. These labourers owned little or no land, although some of them were bound to the land. And finally, their servile status was closely connected with caste.

For the purposes of analysis, this connection is invaluable, for it provides a method of estimating the size of the servile groups at this time.

IV

From the censuses of 1871 and after, which contain caste data, we can estimate the numbers of agricultural labourers in the pre-census period, provided we make certain assumptions. As we have seen, the agrarian 'serfs' and 'slaves' were drawn from a few castes, such as cheruman, pallan, and pariah, which may be termed the agricultural labour castes. The first assumption is that the bulk of the members of these castes were in fact agricultural labourers, whether free or unfree. The second and less important assumption is that these castes did not grow at very different rates from the rest of the population. Thus from the proportion of these castes to the total population at the end of the century, and the figures of the total population at the beginning of the century, one can derive the size of the agricultural labour castes and hence, on the first assumption, the minimum total of agricultural labourers. [57]

However, the argument is not sustained solely by this chain of inference: the evidence of contemporary documents also supports the presumption that slavery was widespread in the early nineteenth century. Figures of 'slave' population in the first part of the nineteenth century are available for certain districts. These figures, which were supplied by the collectors to the Board of Revenue, have to be used with caution, since the collectors did not distinguish clearly between the traditional occupation of the caste and the actual occupation. Whether they are referring to caste or occupation can sometimes, but not always, be inferred from the context; it is likely that most figures of 'slaves' refer not to those who were actually agricultural or other 'slaves' or 'serfs', but to the cheruman, pallan, holeya, etc. But the fact that caste and occupation were so easily confused is significant in itself.

As one would expect, the fullest data are available for Malabar and Kanara, where agricultural servitude took its harshest form. Figures are available from as early as 1800–1, when Buchanan quotes the estimates given to him by the collectors of Malabar and Kanara. The population data are defective, so that the following figures have a fairly wide margin of error, but even allowing for this, the proportion of slaves to *total,* not merely agricultural, population, was significantly large in

certain districts. In South Malabar, the 'slaves' formed 13.4–17.3 per cent of the total population. In the three northern districts of Tellicherry, Mahe, and Dharmapatnam, the slaves formed 3.9 per cent of the total population. [58] In three other northern districts the slaves formed 13 per cent of the population, but if as Buchanan held, the population figures were underestimated, the proportion would be lower. [59] In districts a little further south, the proportion of slaves was 25.1 per cent. [60] In Irnad, in Central Malabar, slaves formed between 10 and 13 per cent of the total population. [61] In 1806–7, the Principal Collector of Malabar estimated that there were 96,386 slaves out of a total population of 700,000 or 14.7 per cent. By 1815-16, the numbers according to the same authority, had dropped to 94,786; in 1819 there were about 100,000 slaves, [62] excluding 3,000 in Wynaad. [63] In 1827, the proportion of slaves to total population had fallen as low as 9.5 per cent (95,696; 1,003,466); but if 3000 slaves for Wynaad are included, the proportion rises to 11.1 per cent. [64] The caste break-up of these figures was given: almost all of the 95,696 slaves consisted of subcastes of the cheruman, except for the 'Betwas or Wettowar' (i.e. *vettuvan)* who numbered 3347. It was pointed out that only a portion of the vettuvan could be included, since it was only in some districts of Malabar that they were claimed as slaves.

However, the number of slaves rose again to 140,933 in 1833. This figure was supplied to the Board of Revenue by the Principal Collector in 1835 on the basis of the Census of 1833. This, he said, included 'slaves of all descriptions'. [65] The judge at Calicut pointed out that the censuses of 1835 and 1842 showed the slaves increasing from 144,000 in 1835 to 159,000 in 1842, from which he concluded that 'no gradual extinction of slavery is going on in Malabar'. [66] The census figures of that period generally contained caste, not occupation, data, but if the judge were quoting caste figures his conclusion was obviously absurd. The figures of these censuses are not available, but taking the nearest population figures which are for 1836 and 1838, the proportion of 'slaves' to total population would have been 12.9 per cent and 13.3 per

cent, respectively. In 1838 the Principal Collector of Malabar estimated that the aggregate number of slaves was a fraction more than one-seventh of the total population. [67]

Thus, while the collectors had concluded on the basis of the figures up to 1827 that in the Malabar area the slave population seemed to have been diminishing, in subsequent years the proportion of 'slaves' to total population returned to the 1801 level of around 13 per cent.

In Kanara, according to the Collector of the Southern Division, [68] the dherd or holeya, who are defined as 'slaves employed in cultivation', alone amounted to 11.9 per cent of the population, [69] while if the three castes who are defined as 'cultivators and servants' or 'cultivators and labourers' and the eight castes defined as 'day labourers' alone, or as combining day labour with other occupations such as traders or messengers, are added, the proportion of agricultural labour to total population rises to 15.4 per cent. Buchanan remarked that in North Kanara there were very few slaves. In 1819, it was estimated that in the whole of Kanara there were 82,000 slaves, of whom 20,000 did not belong to the agricultural castes. [70] Population figures are not available for 1819, but on the assumption that the population increased steadily from 1801 to 1827, in 1819 the proportion of agrestic slaves to total population in South Kanara would have been around 13 per cent. [71]

The Law Commission Report on Slavery of 1841 contains some figures of the numbers of 'slaves' or of pallan or pariah in the Tamil districts, [72] but it is often difficult to relate these to the population figures. In South Arcot the slaves who were 'mostly of the pulley and pariar castes and the majority of them are chiefly devoted to the pursuit of agriculture' were 17,000 in 1819 or less than 4 per cent of the population. [73] For Tanjore the slave population was stated to be 'very numerous' or 'many thousands'. [74] In Madura the Magistrate stated in 1843 that the 'slaves of all kinds' were a 'a triffling proportion' to the whole population, but the Census of 1841 showed that the pariah and pallan were 16 per cent of the population. In Tinnevelly, the Collector estimated in 1832 that the 'slaves' formed 38 per cent of the whole

population, but this was so much higher than the proportion in the other Tamil districts that the 1841 Commission referred the question to the then Collector, who stated that the Censuses of 1821–2 and 1822–3 showed the numbers of pallan, pariah, etc. to be about 16 per cent of the total population, [75] i.e., he assumed that 'slaves' were identical with members of these castes, or at least could not exceed them numerically. In Trichinopoly, the Collector estimated in 1819 that there were 10,000 pallan in the wet lands and 600 in the dry. [76] But this is almost certainly too low a figure, since it works out to about 2.2 per cent of the population of 1823. A census of Trichinopoly was taken in 1830, according to which pallan, pariah, etc. formed 20.8 per cent of the population. [77] Similar caste figures are available for two other districts. [78] In Nellore, in 1827, the pariah were 14.6 per cent of the population, and 16.3 per cent in 1830, and in Salem, in 1830, they formed 12.2 per cent. [79]

These figures have been set out in Table 1, which shows what each figure purports to represent: agricultural labour castes, 'slaves' in general, or 'agricultural slaves' (this distinction is important only in South Kanara, since in the remaining areas the only quantitatively important form of servitude was domestic). According to these figures, in the first half of the nineteenth century the slaves in Malabar were between 13 per cent and 15 per cent of the total population, except for 1827 when the figure was just below 10 per cent. In South Kanara the proportion of slaves to total population was between 12 and 13 per cent. In the Tamil districts, agricultural servitude was extensive in Nellore, South Arcot, Trichinopoly, and Tinnevelly; here the proportion of 'serfs' or of the agricultural labour castes ranged between 12 per cent and 16 per cent, save for the exceptional figure of 20 per cent for Trichinopoly in 1830. It is known that serfdom was at least as extensive in Tanjore, [80] a well irrigated area, but no figures are available. In the other Tamil districts—North Arcot, Chinglepet, Salem, Madura, and Coimbatore—the collectors and judges generally reported that there was very little or no 'slavery'. [81] The Collector of North Arcot reported, for instance, that the total number of 'slaves' in his district, all of whom were engaged in

agriculture, was 688. [82] But it appears from some of their replies not only that there were agricultural labourers, but that these labourers belonged to the agricultural labour castes: the absence of slavery pointed to social and political changes rather than to differences in the mode of production. For example, the Collector of Coimbatore pointed out in 1819 that in many places where there was no slavery, the pallan were in debt slavery to their masters. [83] The Collector of Madura wrote in 1819 that while slavery was not so common in his district as in the neighbouring districts, the system was in full swing during the Nawab's time, when the pariah sold themselves or their relatives to the ryots: this custom had probably been withering away in the British period because the courts did not encourage it. [84]

Table 1

Serfs/Slaves as a Percentage of Total Population

Year	Nellore	S. Arcot	Salem	Trichinopoly	Madura	Tinnevelly	Malabar	S. Kanara
1880–1							13-15[4]	11.9
1807							13-7(S)	
1819		3.7(S)		2.2(C)			15.2(S)[3]	13.0(S)[3]
1823						16.0(C)		
1827	14.6(C)[1]						9.5(S)	
1830	16.3(C)		12.2(C)	20.8(C)				
1833							12.9(S)	
1838							14.3(S)	
1841					16.0(C)			
1857							11.7(S)	
1871	20.5(C)	25.3(C)	13.8(C)	10.0(C)	9.5(C)	9.8(C)	13.2(C)	15.0(C)
1881[2]	18.3(C)	23.5(C)	13.2(C)	10.9(C)	7.9(C)	7.2(C)	11.7(C)	14.4(C)
1891	14.9(C)	24.4(C)	11.2(C)	18.2(C)	13.2(C)	21.0(C)	11.9(C)	13.2(C)
	21.3(C)	27.1(C)	13.8(C)	17.5(C)	12.7(C)	21.1(C)	10.5(C)	11.1(C)
1901	21.3(L)	23.0(L)	15.7(L)	16.4(L)	14.1(L)	17.3(L)	29.5(L)	21.0(L)

Sources:

1. S = Slaves/Serfs. C = Agricultural Labour Castes. L = Agricultural labourers.
2. From 1871 onwards the figures have been derived from census data. For earlier years, the sources are mentioned in the text. From 1871 onwards only the main agricultural labour castes, *i.e.. pariah, pallan, mala, holeya, cherumar* and *pulaiyan*, have been included. From

1871 onwards, *palli* or *vannian* are excluded from the caste figures, although some of the earlier figures may include them.

3. Agricultural slaves alone.
4. The proportion varies from 3.9 per cent in Tellicherry to 25.1 per cent in Tamaracheri and Walacheri, but for most other parts of Malabar, the proportion ranges from 10 to 17 per cent, and for the district as a whole the proportion would be nearer 13–15 per cent.

On the strength of this contemporary evidence there can be no doubt that slaves and serfs were a sizeable proportion of the total population in many areas at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This justifies the attempt to attach the argument from the other end: extrapolating backwards the census figures in the late nineteenth century, and using caste figures as a guide to occupation.

From the Cultivators' Reports the probability also emerges that in Malabar, South Kanara, and those Tamil districts where there was agricultural servitude, [85] the vast majority of the agricultural labour castes were actually agricultural labourers. [86] This hypothesis is supported by the high proportion of the members of these castes who were agricultural labourers towards the end of the century, as shown in the censuses.

Census Data on Caste

Before using the census data on caste, it is necessary to consider how reliable they are. The first problem is to define 'caste'; the point at which one distinguishes a caste from a sub-caste, is almost a matter of individual preference. [87] But this would be no problem if all census reports followed the same principles of classification, and if all the sub-groups within a 'caste', as defined by the census, followed the same traditional occupation. But neither of these two conditions holds. The 1871 and 1818 censuses lump together, under the terms palli and pariah, a number of groups which are separately classified as castes in later reports.

Again, where the sub-division of castes is very broad, the danger of the inclusion of castes whose traditional occupation is not agricultural labour is great: the 1871 and 1881 group palli includes, for example, the two large castes of the *kallan* and *maravan* who were traditionally warriors or fobbers. Even where the classification is more detailed, the castes are too large for homogeneity. There were, for example, 4,439,253 pariah in 1891, divided in the Tamil districts into 348 sub-divisions, including the *kaliyan,* who were weavers, and the *valluvan,* who were medicine-men or priests. [88] Although the *1891 Census Report* adds that the occupation of the vast majority of these sub-castes was agricultural or general labour, [89] the possibility of some sub-castes whose traditional occupation was not agricultural labour being excluded, or vice versa, remains.

Even where the definition of caste is roughly similar, as in 1891 and 1901, the lists of agricultural labour castes differ. This is, however, not a serious problem, since there is general agreement in the various census reports on the main castes—the cheruman, holeya, pallan, palli, and pariah—and these form, in both 1891 and 1901, over 90 per cent of the total.

There are a number of other sources of error: certain titular terms could be used for members of many castes but were confused with caste names (e.g., *muppan);* occupational terms were sometimes specific to one caste *(kusavan,* potter), or applied to the people of different castes performing similar functions (e.g., *pujari,* the Tamil term for priest); [90] the same term would have varying meanings in different areas, [91] whereas the same 'caste' may have different names in different languages. [92] But on the whole these were probably not very important: neither enumerators nor enumerated would be likely to make many mistakes, since caste was even more crucial then than it is today in Hindu society. Deliberate misrepresentation of caste would also be difficult, particularly in the rural areas. [93]

It is true that new castes were constantly being created by changes in the occupation of a section of the old caste, by sections of several castes

coming together in a common occupation, and so forth, but these changes do not appear to have taken place on a significant scale in our period. [94]

The only major caste which is difficult to classify is the Tamil palli or *vannian*. Although the palli are included in all the censuses, they were not, unlike the other agricultural labour castes, untouchables. This, together with the fact that few of the early reports on serfdom in the Tamil districts mention them, makes it unlikely that they were traditionally serfs. In fact the Collector of Tanjore wrote in 1819 that 'the slaves here are of two castes only, the Pallar and the Pariah', [95] whereas Ellis stated that the agricultural slave castes were the palli, pallan, and pariah. [96] Again Ellis states that the palli were the slaves of the Brahmins and that the other two castes served non-Brahmins, while according to the *1881 Census Report* many of the palli 'probably were once the predial slaves, the *adscripti glebae* of the Vellala landlords.' [97] The Collector, South Arcot, wrote to the Board of Revenue in 1891 that 'the slaves in this collectorate are mostly of the *pulley* and *pariah* castes', where *pulley* may stand either for palli or pallan. [98]

Also in 1871 and 1901, less than 20 per cent of the palli were actually agricultural labourers. On the other hand, the *1871 Census Report*, stating that 70 per cent of them were 'cultivators' (as opposed to labourers, etc.), remarked that a large proportion of the *Vunnies* (i.e., vannian or palli) were abject slaves before the period of British administration, incapable of owning property, or of cultivating on their own account. Others were thieves and robbers by profession, and existed on plunder. A wonderful change must have taken place in the last century to bring more than two-thirds of them into the class of small farmers, or peasant proprietors.' [99]

It would probably be safer to exclude the palli from the agricultural labour castes, but the proportion of such castes to total population has been calculated both including and excluding the palli. Of the five main castes which were definitely 'agricultural labour' castes, i.e., the pallan, pariah, cheruman, mala, and holeya, these alone formed 12 per cent,

13.1 per cent, 12.9 per cent and 12.5 per cent of the total population in 1871, 1881, 1891, and 1901, respectively. If the palli are included, the proportion rises to around 20 per cent, and since they are largely a Tamil caste, the proportion would be much higher in the Tamil districts.

Before discussing the significance of these figures, it will be useful to relate the data available for certain districts in the pre-census years to the census figures. This has been done in Table 1 which shows first, that there is remarkably little discrepancy between the early and later data: in fact, it is only the 1819 figures for Trichinopoly and South Arcot which are incongruous with later data, and these are almost certainly far too low. The agreement between the different sets of data is particularly significant in that the proportion of the agricultural labour castes to total population varies in the different districts. The district figures do not throw much light on overall rates of growth: in Vellore, Salem, and Tinnevelly, the proportion of agricultural labour castes to total population was higher in 1891 and 1901 than in 1827 or 1832; while in Malabar and South Kanara the proportion was lower in 1901 than in 1801, but a little higher than in 1827 in Malabar.

A priori it is evident that the relative rates of growth of the different castes were affected by various factors which worked in different ways. The lower castes probably had a higher natural rate of increase than the upper castes, but they would undoubtedly have been more affected by famine. [100] Also, emigrants from South India were largely drawn from the agricultural labour and other low castes. Finally, there was more conversion of the lower castes to Christianity and Islam; but this became really significant only in the twentieth century. [101] Since these factors work in both directions, it can perhaps be assumed in view of the pre-census data that the agricultural labour castes formed about 12 per cent of the population in the first half of the nineteenth century as well as the latter part, if the palli are excluded, and about 20 per cent if the latter are included. So the crucial question is: how strong was the connection between caste and occupation in the nineteenth century?

The 1901, 1911, and 1921 censuses give figures of the actual occupations followed by members of each caste; while the 1901 figures relate only to selected castes in selected districts, the 1911 and 1921 figures relate to the total population of the selected castes. Two facts emerge from these figures: first, over 65 per cent of the workers in the agricultural labour castes followed their traditional occupations in 1901, and second, even though between 1901 and 1921 the proportion of each caste doing so had declined, it was in most cases well above 50 per cent. The only exception to both these generalizations was the palli, as few as 18.5 per cent of whom were agricultural labourers in 1901. Since the proportion had risen to 56.5 per cent in 1921, it could be argued that the districts selected for 1901 may have been atypical, but for the fact that the 1871 figure, for what it is worth, is remarkably close to the 1901 figure of 18.5 per cent. Apart from the palli, the connection between caste and occupation was fairly close even in 1921, and was much closer in 1901 and 1911. And in the case of the cheruman, the connection was practically complete: over 90 per cent were agricultural labourers even as late as 1921.

Although the 1881 and 1891 censuses do not contain actual figures on this point, they do make statements of relevance to it. For example, the *1891 Census Report* states that the bulk of the palli were still labourers; [102] and again that the occupation of the vast majority of the pariah was agricultural or general labour. [103]

For certain districts details of the relation between caste and occupation are also given. Thus in 1871 in South Arcot, the pariah and vannian formed the bulk of the labourers, while half the pariah were cultivators; [104] and in Nellore, a Telugu district, the non-agricultural labour castes formed the bulk of the labourers. [105]

Granted that the bulk of the so-called agricultural labour castes, say, 65–75 per cent, were in fact agricultural labourers towards the end of the nineteenth century, and that the proportion of these castes to total population remained constant at 12–20 per cent throughout the century, what inferences can be drawn about the numbers of

agricultural labourers at the beginning of the century? Obviously, the close connection between these castes and their traditional occupations around 1900 is not in itself proof that such a connection existed earlier. [106]

Table 2

Percentage of Actual Workers (or Population) Following Traditional Occupation

	1871	1901*	1911	1921
1. Cheruman	93.5	95.6	91.2	
2. Holeya		65.7	79.7	44.2
3. Mala		75.5	79.0	60.9
4. Pallan		—	—	59.4
5. Palli	18.6**	18.5	—	59.4
6. Pariah	38.4**	64.2	—	56.5

* In selected districts only.

** The *1871 Census Report* states that 63.9 per cent of the male *palli* were occupied, of whom 11.9 per cent were labourers for hire; out of 63.5 per cent of the occupied pariah, 24.4 per cent were 'labourers, agricultural or otherwise', p. 170.

There can be little doubt that in those districts where agricultural servitude was rigorous, such as Malabar and some of the Tamil areas, most of the members of the agricultural labour castes were not only agricultural labourers but were also unfree. Within these districts, such unfree labourers were concentrated in the irrigated areas where paddy was cultivated. Thus in Trichinopoly, the pallan were bunched in the wet zones. In Salem again, the few slaves who existed under Muslim rule belonged to the wet lands near the river Kaveri. [107] (There is another consideration as well. Since only members of the agricultural labour castes could be deprived of their freedom, [108] the estimate of the strength of these castes sets an upper limit to the extent of agricultural serfdom and slavery at the beginning of the nineteenth century.)

It also seems likely that where these forms of servitude flourished, the bulk of labourers were unfree; here free labourers of other castes were rare. This was almost certainly true of Malabar and South Kanara. Thus in 1819, the Collector of Malabar reported that 90 per cent of the cultivation in South Malabar, particularly in the rice lands, was performed entirely by the cheruman. [109] The Collector of South Kanara remarked in 1801 that nearly all the cultivation was carried on by holeya 'or slaves of other sorts'. He added: 'An Estate indeed without a property in some of these people would be of little value because day labourers are not to be procured in this as in other countries.' [110] Again in 1843, the Collector replied, when asked to report on the condition of the working classes, that 'by the labouring classes, I concluded, the *dhers* or slaves are alluded to, by whom nearly the whole of the lands in Canara are cultivated, and indeed, with the exception of a certain number of free labourers, probably not more than four or five thousand, who annually contract to work in the Balaghaut Talooks, and an inconsiderable number of coolies who find employment at Mangalore, and several of the other principal seaports on the coast, there is no other class to whom the term can properly be applied.' [111]

The caste figures are most revealing for those districts where slavery or serfdom prevailed. Thus in Malabar it has been seen that in the beginning of the nineteenth century at least, nearly every member of the slave castes, such as the cheruman, was in fact an agricultural labourer, i.e., at least 10–15 per cent of the total population were landless agricultural labourers. In addition, there were hired labourers. Thus Buchanan stated that in Cannanore and Sheykal in North Malabar, the greater part of the cultivation was done by hired labourers, who did not belong to these castes, such as the *nair, moppilah* and *tiya.* [112] Again in 1819, the Collector of Malabar reported that in North Malabar hired labourers were mainly used. [113] Similarly in South Kanara, around 12–13 per cent of the total population consisted of agricultural serfs or slaves.

In those Tamil districts where serfdom was widespread, such as Tanjore, Tinnevelly and Trichinopoly, the caste figures are probably a

fairly good guide to the strength of agricultural labour, particularly in the irrigated areas. It is in the remaining Tamil districts and in the Telugu districts (apart, possibly, from Kistna) that the caste figures are of less utility. But the agricultural labour castes were represented in these districts too; in fact, even as late as 1830 the proportions were as high as 15 per cent in Nellore and 12 per cent in Salem.

It is likely that in these districts many members of the agricultural labour castes had also been slaves or serfs at some earlier period, but that, for various reasons, they had already won their freedom by the beginning of the British period. The *mala* of the Telugu districts, to take one instance, were traditionally weavers as well as agricultural workers, and at the beginning of the nineteenth century the weavers may not have been reduced to agricultural labour. Moreover, members of other castes may have been doing field work for wages. While the caste figures alone hardly allow us to estimate the numbers of agricultural labourers in these districts, the records do not suggest that the agrarian structure here was so widely different from elsewhere as to have made agricultural labour a negligible quantity.

Whatever their drawbacks, the data on the strength of the agricultural labour castes at the end of the nineteenth century, coupled with the scattered evidence on caste and serfdom at the opening of that century, suffice to destroy the thesis that agricultural labour was a quantitatively insignificant group at the time when British rule began.

It is not only the number of agricultural labourers that is significant but also their status. The complexity of some forms of serfdom and slavery makes it clear that these were social institutions of long standing. The differences in the degree of servitude from area to area also point to the long and uneven evolution of these social forms. So little is known of the social and economic history of pre-British India that it cannot be said whether the evolution was in the direction of freedom or not. Were the serfs of the Tamil areas descendants of the original inhabitants of these lands, enslaved by the ruling race? Were the slaves of Malabar the descendants of free men who had bartered their freedom for the protection of their landlords during times of

trouble? Whatever the answers to those questions, it is clear that the British found, and did not create, a relatively large group of agricultural labourers, in varying degrees of bondage, but with one feature in common—they were landless.

It is of great conceptual interest that the agrarian structure was so closely related to the caste system. This again raises a fundamental question—was the fact that there was a close correlation between these landless groups as defined by function and as defined by caste proof of the efficiency of the system, or did caste hinder the extension of cultivation? The question is, again, unanswerable at this stage, but the correlation between caste and function is of great pragmatic interest as well. It enables us, by extrapolation from the caste distribution at the end of the nineteenth century, to make a fairly firm estimate of the proportion of landless labourers to the total population at the beginning of the century. The census figures of occupation show that there was an increase in the proportion of agricultural labourers by the end of the century, but this was not as sharp and dramatic as is usually held. [114] Apparently the steep rise in this proportion by 1956 is at least partly a result of the population explosion of the twentieth century.

This leads on to conclusions of a more general nature. It would appear that the impact of British imperialism on South Indian society has been greatly exaggerated; the structure of that society was modified, but not completely remoulded, by British rule. And if this is true of Madras, with its very high incidence of landlessness, it may well be true *a fortiori* of the other regions of India. The British were the paramount power in India but they were not all-powerful there.

But the point is a deeper one than that. It may be that the institutional effects of colonial rule have been exaggerated. Often the native institutions were resilient enough to ward off or soften the institutional changes forced upon their societies by the foreigner. Obviously, the Indian social structure, with a base as durable and pervasive as caste, was particularly well equipped to fight a long rearguard action of this sort, but the principle may well hold good for

other societies similarly threatened with massive changes from the outside.

3

The Growth of Agricultural Labour in India—A Note*

J. KRISHNAMURTY

There appears to be general acceptance of the conclusion of Surendra J. Patel that agricultural labour has been increasing rapidly, relative to the agricultural working force since 1870.[1] As we shall argue below this conclusion was reached by Patel on the basis of a serious misunderstanding of census data. More recent evidence also suggests that Patel's conclusion needs drastic revision.

Patel claims that 'during the course of six decades from 1871 to 1931, the proportion of agricultural labourers to the agricultural population in India increased from a meagre one-seventh to more than one-third.'[2] This assertion is questionable for a variety of reasons. First, the estimates for 1871–2 relate to adult males, for 1881 to males, and for 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921, and 1931 to persons (i.e., males plus females). While worker estimates for adult males (aged 12 and over) and for total males are likely to be fairly comparable, estimates for persons are generally higher than for males alone. (See, for example, the results in Table 2.) Using 1871–2 and 1881 data for males and data for the subsequent censuses for males plus females may exaggerate the increase in agricultural labour.

Secondly, while the 1871–2 figures relate to British India (including British Burma), the 1881 and 1891 estimates relate to a larger area including Baroda, Central India States, Hyderabad, Kashmir, Mysore, and Rajputana. The estimates for 1901–31 relate to an area comprising present-day India, Pakistan, Burma, and Bangladesh. The big differences in coverage between 1871–2 on the one hand, and the subsequent censuses on the other may make it difficult to compare even the percentage share of agricultural labour in the agricultural working force.

Thirdly, while for 1871–2 and 1881, as also for 1921 and 1931, the worker concept is used, for 1891, 1901 and 1911, the concept of 'population supported' (i.e., workers and non-workers supported by each occupation) is employed. For 1901 and 1911, alternative figures according to the worker concept are available in the census volumes but Patel does not use them.

Finally, there are the problems of changes in the classification of economic activity from the census. For most censuses, the critical problem is how to distribute the 'unspecified' components among the different branches of economic activity. Patel lumps them with agricultural labour. There is certainly an argument against this as we do have evidence that a significant proportion of the unspecified belong to urban areas.[3] But for our present purpose, we are prepared to concede that provided 'general labour' is added to agricultural labour in every census, the pattern of changes in the share of agricultural labour in the agricultural workforce may not be affected, though the share may be overstated throughout.

The estimates relating to 1871–2 and 1881 and 1891 provided by Patel have their own special problems. Patel believes that in 1871–2 and 1881 the census classification used to denote agricultural labourers was 'general labourers'.[4] While it is true that in 1871–2 there was no separate category called agricultural labour, this is certainly not the case in 1881 where agricultural labour was Class IV, Order 8, Group 7. Patel's estimates for 1881 are therefore gross underestimates of agricultural

labour in relation to the agricultural workforce (15 per cent compared to the corrected proportion, 27 per cent).

To return to the 1871–2 census, the agricultural working force (excluding agricultural labourers) is certainly an overestimate as it includes workers engaged in pastoral activities, plantations, forestry, etc. —which in the estimates for later years are excluded from the agricultural workforce, except for plantation workers who are added to agricultural labourers. The absence of a specific category 'agricultural labourers' in 1871–2 may also have led to a number of persons reporting themselves as cultivators who would otherwise have been deemed agricultural labourers. Patel's figures for 1891 (like his figures for 1881) are not taken from the census volumes but from *Financial and Commercial Statistics of British India* (Calcutta, 1899) and this has apparently led him into error. The figures obtained from the census volumes would suggest a much higher proportion of agricultural labour in 1891 (22.9 per cent instead of 13.0 per cent reported by Patel).

In Table 1, we present the revised results of the share of agricultural labour in the agricultural working force—separately for males and females, when possible—and as far as possible for the working force, rather than the 'population supported'. It will be obvious that the proportion did not rise 'from a meagre one-seventh to more than one-third'. The results for males would suggest that the share fluctuated between 20 and 30 per cent if we remember that the 1871–2 estimates were on the lower side. The proportions for females show wide fluctuations, reflecting the ambiguities of the definition of economic activity in their case and the figures for persons also show fluctuations with a relatively narrow range (though 1931 seems rather out of line). In fact, if we rely mainly on the series for males, it is reasonable to believe that the share fluctuated around 25 per cent of the agricultural working force.

More recent evidence for 1951 and 1961 however related to the Indian Union and while the data were not available to Patel in 1952, they were available before 1965 when he republished his paper on agricultural labour.[5] The currently available data for the Indian Union

for the period 1901–61 (Table 2) suggest again that through the period about 25 per cent of the male agricultural working force were agricultural labourers. For both sexes (i.e., persons) a proportion of about 30 per cent appears to have been the norm. So the data for 1871–1931—largely following Patel's own methods—and our own Table 2, for the Indian Union, 1901–61, suggest no sustained upward trend in the share of agricultural labour in the agricultural working force.

In conclusion, it may be pointed out that the available evidence suggests that the industrial distribution of the working force showed no signs of structural transformation,[6] and, as we have shown above, within agriculture it cannot be said that the share of agricultural labour was steadily rising. Simple models of the decline of manufacturing employment and the mass conversion of cultivators and artisans into agricultural labourers cannot be sustained for the period after 1870, on the basis of the available census evidence.

Table 1

The Share of Agricultural Labourers in the Agricultural Working Force in India: 1881–1931

			A. Males			
	Actual Workers	*1871–72 (adults)*	*1881*	*1901*	*1911*	*1921*	*1931*
1.	Agricultural Workforce (million)	45.7	49.5	64.8	70.4	71.7	73.9
2.	Agricultural Labourers (millions)	8.2	13.4	16.4	16.3	15.4	21.9
3.	Row 2+Row 1 (%)	18.2	27.1	25.3	23.2	21.5	29.6
			B. Females				
	Actual Workers			*1901*	*1911*	*1921*	*1931*
1.	Agricultural Workforce (million)			30.8	34.9	35.0	30.8
2.	Agricultural Labourers (millions)			13.6	15.1	12.2	18.1
3.	Row 2 + Row 1 (%)			44.2	43.3	36.5	58.9
			C. Both Sexes				
	Actual Workers Population Supported	*1891a*	*1901a*	*1901*	*1911*	*1921*	*1931*
1.	Agricultural Workforce Population (million)	195.6	207.7	95.6	105.3	106.7	104.7
2.	Agricultural Labourers (millions)	44.8	53.1	30.0	31.4	28.2	40.0
3.	Row 2 + Row 1 (%)	22.9	25.6	31.4	29.8	26.4	38.2

Sources: 1871–2: *Memorandum on the Census of India (1871–72),* London, 1875, p. 55. No change is made in Patel's estimate. We treat workers in 'Agriculture' as cultivators and 'Labourers' as agricultural labourers. The territory covered was British India and British Burma. 1881: *Report on the Census of British India, 17th February 1881*, vol. III, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1883, p. 71ff. We include land proprietor, farmer, grazier, farm bailiff, tenant, cultivator, puttadars, ryots, agricultural labourer (including field watchman) and general labourer, and regard farm bailiffs, and general labourers as

being part of the category of agricultural labourers. The coverage was extended to include Baroda, Central India States, Hyderabad, Kashmir, Mysore and Rajasthan.

1891*a* and 1901*a*: Census of India, 1901, *General Report,* London, 1904, pp. 238–41. We include landholders and tenants; agricultural labourers; growers of special products and general labour in the agricultural labour. The figures in this case relate to 'population supported', i.e., workers and non-workers deemed dependent on that occupation. The coverage for 1891 was virtually the same as for 1881. From 1901 onwards present-day India, Burma, Pakistan and Bangladesh are covered.

1901 and 1911: We use the same source as Patel, i.e., *Census of India, 1901,* vol. I, pt II, p. 368ff; and *Census of India, 1911,* vol. I, part II, p. 262ff. We follow the same categories as Patel, but obtain figures for 'actual workers' instead of 'population supported' and separately for males, females and persons.

1921 and 1931: We merely obtain a breakdown of Patel's estimates by sex and make a few minor corrections. See *Census of India, 1921,* vol. 1, pt II, p. 22ff, and *Census of India, 1931, vol.* I, pt II, p. 206ff.

Table 2

Share of Agricultural Labourers in the Agricultural Working Force: The Indian Union, 1901–1961 (Percentage)

	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961
Male	24.1	24.5	21.9	26.4	25.1	24.6
Females	43.5	44.4	37.0	43.3	42.6	32.2
Both Sexes	31.1	32.2	27.4	31.8	30.7	26.4

Sources: J. Krishnamurty, 'The Industrial Distribution of the Working Force of the Indian Union, 1901–1961: A Study of Selected Aspects', (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis), University of Delhi, Delhi, 1971, Table 3:1 and 4:1. We include cultivators,

agricultural labourers and a part of the unspecified workers as comprising the agricultural work force and determine the proportion of the last two to the total. We have allocated the unspecified *pro-rata* between agricultural labour, construction and some service activities. In this table coverage is restricted to the Indian Union (i.e., India after 1947). Figures in Table 1 cannot be directly compared as they relate mainly to India including Burma, Pakistan and Bangladesh and as the unspecified (following Patel's procedure) were added to agricultural labour.

4

The *Hali* System in South Gujarat*

JAN BREMAN

Masters and Servants

The Permanence of the Service Relationship: In the earliest reports of British administrators, during the first decades of the nineteenth century, there was mention of a system of attachment —*halipratha*—which later became known as a form of bondage.[1]

Hali was the term applied to a farm servant who, with his family, was in the permanent employ of a landlord, a *dhaniamo.* The service was not contracted for a definite period; as a rule it continued indefinitely. It usually began when an agricultural labourer wished to marry and found a master who would pay for the marriage. The debt thus incurred attached the servant to the master for life. It increased in the course of the years, so that repayment was practically impossible. The service relationship ended only when the hali was taken over by another master. Although in such a case the original master received compensation, the transfer was not a business transaction; in several reports it was stated emphatically that halis were never sold.

Not only was entering into bondage the beginning of a lifelong service relationship, but the unfree elements in it were reinforced by some hereditary features. It is true that the debt incurred by the hali

during his lifetime could not be passed on to the next generation, but the master had a claim to the son of his servant, as it was thanks to the master's beneficence that the boy had grown up, living on the dhaniamo's food.[2] When the son married, usually at the age of 16, it was therefore natural that he should enter the employ of his father's master. Only when the master did not need another servant was the boy free to look for another master. These hereditary features were so essential to the relationship that, according to some reports, only those agricultural labourers who had been attached to the same family from father to son were called halis.[3]

The Social Background of Masters and Servants: As elsewhere in India, the servants came from castes of tribal origin. Most of the halis in the plain of south Gujarat were Dublas. In some regions the category of farm servants included Kolis, the poorest members of this caste of small farmers and sharecroppers, who, it was said, had fallen so low because of excessive drinking. They formed a separate group (*gulam* Kolis, i.e. slave Kolis), who had little contact with their fellow caste members. It was said that they were obliged to practise endogamy or even found partners among the Dublas. Members of other tribal groups were also mentioned as halis, but bondage has been identified with the Dublas to such an extent that for the members of this caste of agricultural labourers the term *halpatis* has become general. It is a euphemism for hali, introduced by Gandhi when he campaigned for the abolishment of halipratha in the 1930s.

Most halis were Dublas, but not all Dublas were permanently attached to a master. Lack of data makes it impossible to determine proportions; we can only say with certainty that bondage was the prevailing service relationship. In 1825, the Collector wrote that in Surat there were more 'slaves' than anywhere else in India, and in one of the settlement reports of the end of the last century it was stated that the majority of agricultural labourers consisted of dependent farm servants.[4] There was, however, no clear-cut difference between bound and free agricultural labourers. The *chuta halis* (literally: free halis) belonged to the latter category. They, too, were indebted to a landowner,

though not as deeply as the *bhandela halis,* the bonded servants. Unlike the latter, they did not work for the same farmer all the year round, but only when he needed them, and at other times they had to provide for themselves. The difference is not always very clear, but what it amounts to is that the chuta halis were less bound and, on the other hand, had less security. In the sources I consulted there is no mention of a category of completely free labour.

The servants were invariably in the employ of members of prominent castes. These included Rajputs and Borahs, who were not very numerous but in some villages were the most important landlords. In the northern part of the plain, halis worked for Kanbi landowners, but it was pre-eminently the Anavil Brahmans who employed halis. They were the dominant caste in south Gujarat and, as such, the owners of the best and largest plots of land. The hali system, in other words, is especially identified with these two agrarian castes. 'The Dublas are the most degraded of all the agricultural classes. They were, for the most part, the "Halis" or slaves of the Anawala brahmins by whom they were employed in cultivation of their lands. Almost all families of the Dublas had been slaves for many generations.'[5]

It would not be correct to represent the landlords as large land-owners. Only a small portion of the Anavil Brahmans possessed so much land that they could rightly be called zamindars. These zamindars, the most powerful and prominent of the Anavil Brahmans, had many dozens of servants in their employ, and the same was true of some large landlords in villages where sugarcane, a labour-intensive crop, was grown. In contrast, most of the members of the dominant caste had only one or two servants. The least prosperous among them even had to do without any help whatsoever.

The Origin of the Hali System: 'The Desaees Buttela Brahmins in Parchol, Soopa and some other pergunnahs, possess as large a portion of slaves as may be found perhaps in any part of India', wrote the Collector in reply to some questions on the incidence of slavery in his district shortly after Surat had come into the hands of the British.[6] Such clear evidence of the existence of the hali system even in the early

nineteenth century refutes the view of Patel that this form of bondage arose under and in consequence of colonial rule.[7] As he mentions the hali system explicitly, not much is left of his argument as tested by the situation in south Gujarat.

Kosambi, and others, connected the rise of bondage with periods of famine. It was thought that in consequence of such a crisis, tribal groups became enmeshed in a debt relationship from which neither they nor the following generations could escape.[8] As an explanation, however, famine seems too incidental an occurrence to give rise to an institution of such importance, which governed the relations between landlords and agricultural labourers in south Gujarat for so long a period. Instead of attributing decisive importance to events that took place in the historic past, it is more fruitful to retrace the general circumstances that favoured the hali system.

In this connection, it is significant that the Anavil Brahmans are regarded as those who opened up the plain of south Gujarat. These Anavils are a caste of '*grahaste*' Brahmans, that is, those who are not allowed to perform any priestly functions. Concerning these landowning Brahmans, who also live elsewhere in India, Baine writes,

> Wherever they have settled in large masses, as in the Gangetic Doab or Oudh, or in compact ideal colonies, which probably preceded their advance as a sacerdotal body, they have taken to cultivation on the same lines as the ordinary peasantry, except that they but very rarely put their hands to the plough, though they go as far as standing upon the crossbar of the harrow to lend their weight to that operation. Owing to this caste- imposed restriction, probably, it may be noted that where the Brahman has settled otherwise than as a part of a large general community, he is the centre of a well-defined system of predial servitude, his land being cultivated for him by hereditary serfs of undoubtedly Dasyu descent. This is the case of the Masthan of Orissa and Gujarat (i.e. the Anavils), and with the Haiga or Halvika of Kanara, and the Nambutri of the Malabar Coast, all of whom have settled in very fertile country.[9]

Various local legends, also in south Gujarat, recount how Rama distributed the land among colonizing Brahmans and provided them with tribal labour to reclaim and till this land. As in the case of the other peasant Brahmans, it is not certain whether the Anavils came from elsewhere. At any rate, there is no doubt that agricultural groups of this kind managed to lay claim to the land in their present territory at an early stage. Whether in doing so they dispossessed any tribal communities, particularly Dublas, is not clear. Presumably the latter, who were hunters and shifting cultivators, gradually—and especially in periods of scarcity—came to depend upon a class of substantial peasants, whether or not of alien origin, who had been hinduized at an earlier period, and who ultimately found recognition as Brahmans. The economic and social subjection of the tribal population in the plain may have laid the foundation for the Anavil's brahmanization.

This process cannot be dated with any certainty, but it probably took place long before the time of the Moghuls. As there are no historical data to confirm such a development as is sketched above, only the plausibility of the explanation can be demonstrated.

Labour Conditions

Hali means literally, 'he who handles the plough *(hal)'*. It is not an arbitrary designation, but indicates an activity which members of high castes in many regions of India try to avoid because of its impure character. The hali bound not only himself, but also his wife and children. The farm servant worked chiefly on the land, but he was also the personal servant of the landlord—an odd-job man who attended him, ran errands for him, in short, assisted his master in everything and did what could reasonably be expected from him.[10] Neither the work nor the working-hours of the hali were clearly defined. At all times of the day, and if necessary of the night, he was at his master's beck and call, always ready to carry out orders.

His wife, the *harekwali,* served as maid in the house of the master, usually only in the mornings. Her tasks ranged from grinding grain, fetching water, sweeping the floor, washing up after meals, and cleaning

the stable to emptying the chamber pot on the dunghill. She did the rough household work which elsewhere was done by members of the impure castes. Moreover, she helped out on the land in the busy season.

The servant's daughter assisted her mother in the household of the master. His son—as *govalio* (cowherd)—tended the cattle and did various light jobs. In this period the master could test him to see whether he qualified both in ability and in personal behaviour for later employment as a servant.

Attachment for an indeterminate period, severance of the relationship only in exceptional cases and often its prolongation into following generations, work obligations for the servant's whole family, and finally the non-specific and exchangeable nature of the service were the chief elements of servitude in the past.

The counterservice expected from the master could be summarized as the obligation to provide for his servants. As one of the first reports on the hali system commented, 'rearing and feeding in years of scarcity and the charges of settling them in marriage (about 30 rupees) are all borne by the master.'[11] On the days that the hali worked, he was entitled to an allowance of grain—the *bhata*—which varied according to the size of his family. Instead of this grain he sometimes received a piece of land to till with his master's land; he was allowed to keep the produce for himself. In addition, he was given a slight breakfast in the master's house, and in the busy season also a midday meal on the land.

The master allotted him a site where he could build his hut, and supplied the materials for it. Each year the hali received some clothing: a headcloth, a jacket, a loincloth, a scarf for the winter, and a pair of shoes. His wife was entitled to a sari and some brass ornaments every year, and a meal daily after work. Further, the hali was allowed to gather firewood on the master's land. When the day's labour was over he received some tobacco and sometimes some toddy (fermented coconut milk). When he was ill, the master provided medicines, and if he lived to old age the master gave him food every day when he could no longer work.[12] As evidenced by the extent of the benefits enjoyed by the hali

he received total care, that is to say, he depended for his every need on what the master put into his hands. Practically everything he received was in kind. Only on special occasions, decided by the master and granted as a favour, did the servant get a small amount of money instead of his grain allowance. He received some coins as drink money *(pivanum)* especially at the high religious festivals of Diwali and Holi, and on festive occasions in the master's house. By the end of the nineteenth century, money had become a somewhat more important component of the total package of the master's counterservices but for the year as a whole it remained a trifling amount. Most of it was spent on spirits bought from the Bania or Parsi in the village.

In this connection it should be noted that the debt of the hali, though recorded in money terms, in fact largely represented gifts in kind. For the marriage feast of his servant the master supplied great quantities of food and drink, and, in addition, some pieces of clothing for the hali and his wife. As for ready money, the servant was given the amount that he had to hand over to the bride's father, rarely more than 10 rupees. The money value of the total expenses with which bondage began in the last century did not exceed 100 rupees, and usually it was far less. This, however, was only the initial debt, which increased as the years went by.

The master did not have employment for his servants throughout the year, certainly not for all of them. When there was little or no work for a hali he was allowed to work for someone else and keep his earnings. Yet it was precisely in the slack period that other landowners needed little extra labour. At first the hali lived on the credit he had saved up, withdrawing only so much grain from his daily allowance as he really needed for food. The rest remained to his account, but he could never save enough to bridge the whole of the slack period. When his reserve was exhausted—and it did not last long, the master being the only one who kept book—he was allotted a quantity of grain, an advance payment which was now called *khavati* (literally, to eat). At the end of the rainy season the account was made up and the balance he owed was added to his total debt. Illness and other accidental circumstances caused the servant to be ever more deeply indebted to his master, and repayment was obviously out of the question.

Servitude as a Labour Relationship

In the literature, the bondage of the Dublas in the past has been explained on purely economic grounds, and stress was laid on the fact that a number of landowners needed to have an adequate amount of labour permanently at their disposal. As stated above, it was the large landowners (chiefly Anavil Brahmans who did little or no work on the land themselves) who had one or more halis in their employ, as they were the only ones who could afford such assistance. The nature of the crops was another factor. In regions with an intensive crop system, especially where sugarcane was grown, there appear to have been more halis than elsewhere. They, however, had no year-round work either.[13] A motive, at least equally important, for the landlord was his desire to ensure his having enough help at the peaks of the agrarian cycle. As agriculture depends on the rains, it is essential that certain activities, for instance sowing, transplanting, and harvesting rice, and ploughing the land before a new crop is sown, should be finished within a few days. The normally abundant supply of labour very soon turns into a severe shortage. So as to have enough assistance at the most decisive moments, it was necessary for the landlords to take on permanently at least one farm servant, and if possible more, thereby monopolizing their labour and that of their families.[14] It should be added that to employ servants was not very expensive at the time.

The motivation of the landowning Anavil Brahman was as described above. Yet if it was advantageous for him to appoint Dublas in permanent service, what made the Dublas offer themselves as farm servants on such unfavourable terms?

That question is easy to answer when it is assumed that bondage was simply imposed. This is how the *hali* system has usually been represented. Great emphasis has been laid on the coercion applied by the masters, both in contracting and in maintaining the relationship. As already mentioned, it was not possible for the servant to abrogate the agreement, and his son was exposed to great pressure to follow in his father's footsteps. The servant was not allowed to leave his master until the debt had been paid off. It is therefore not surprising that the first

British government officials in the early nineteenth century spoke of the halis as agrarian slaves, bound servants, predial labourers, etc., a view which still has not essentially changed.

Unfree elements were certainly inherent in the hali system. But, an interpretation which takes nothing else into account is too one-sided. For it is difficult to maintain that the servitude of the Dubla agricultural labourers was forced upon them against their will. On the contrary, for lack of continuous employment in the traditional agricultural economy, those who had managed to find someone to provide for them had every reason to consider themselves lucky.

It follows that servitude was in fact preferred to free labour by landowners and agricultural labourers alike, and paradoxically enough for the same reason: the unequal distribution of the work on the land over the different seasons. Economically, the hali system was an attractive proposition for both parties. The Anavils wished to offset the risk of temporary labour shortage as much as they could, while the Dublas were well aware that there was work for them only during a limited period. As farm servants they did not receive any remuneration, but they were entitled to credit. Under the circumstances it was hardly relevant that their debt increased in this way. More important was the fact that their subsistence was assured in an economy of scarcity. 'The reason why he (the hali) sticks to the Dhaniama is that he helps him on all occasions of death, marriage, etc. In a way the Dhaniama is his sahukar (moneylender). I called a few Hallees of each kind and questioned them closely and to my great surprise found that they were very contented with their lot.'[15] More telling than these testimonials of satisfaction before a British official are the statements in various reports from the last century that the halis were better dressed and had more and better food than those Dublas who were not attached.[16]

Dhaniamo means 'he who gives riches'.[17] At first glance such an appellation may seem somewhat exaggerated. The master's obligations did not go beyond providing the most indispensable means of existence for his halis. In the traditional agricultural economy, however, characterized as it was by widely varying crop yields and a strongly

fluctuating labour demand, to be attached or unattached meant, in the final issue, either to have secured one's existence—however minimal—or to be so impoverished that a period of scarcity might easily bring starvation.

It is therefore more than doubtful that the hali strove to end his attachment. His being coerced to work is usually inferred from the condition that the servant was not allowed to leave his master as long as he was indebted to him. But the debt was rather fictitious in character and, if only for this reason, the term of debt slavery applied to this form of servitude is not very felicitous. Not only was repayment merely theoretical on account of the hali's minimal remuneration, but it was not envisaged by either of the parties.

For the master, the expense involved in the beginning of the service relationship was an investment he had to make in order to obtain the services of a farm servant. He did, however, try to keep this debt within reasonable limits, as he well knew he could not recall it. The hali, on the other hand, did his best to maximize it, and tried to get something out of his master as often as he could. That his dependence thus increased did not trouble him in the least. In view of his slender chances of finding work as an unattached labourer, repayment of his debt in order to end his bondage was the last thing he wanted. In short, servitude was sought rather than avoided by the Dublas.

So much was labour compulsion regarded as fundamental to bondage that some authors found it surprising that the halis were in no way inferior to the other Dublas.[18] Not only were they not held in contempt, a Dubla even was gratified if his daughter married one. Only then could he be sure she was provided for.

The option held by a master on the son of his farm servant also applied the other way around. Continuance of the tie from generation to generation was contingent upon the approval of the hali and his descendants. For them it was as much a right as a duty to succeed their fathers as farm servants.[19] The initiative to begin the relation was taken by both parties, and it was in the interest of both to maintain it.

Such an interpretation points in the direction of voluntary servitude. The motive of the master aside, the Dubla himself preferred permanent attachment, but it should be added that in general agricultural labourers chose dependence only to hold their own and to secure a livelihood. Nevertheless, it did not in any way alter their lack of freedom.

In both of the explanations of the hali system discussed above, the labour motive was the only one taken into account. In interpreting this system, however, we should consider both the economic use of farm servants and also their function in the value system obtaining for landlords of the past.

To put it more concretely, dhaniamo and hali were not simply employer and employee. This was one aspect of the relationship; some elements of patronage could, however, also be distinguished. I shall examine this in the following paragraphs, beginning with the position of the dominant Anavil caste during the last century.

The Position of the Anavil Brahmans in the Rural Structure

It is the lifestyle of a landowner that determines, in part, whether he needs any labourers and how he employs them. That is to say, labour demand is determined by considerations of a social nature which entail economic consequences.

A landlord's need of the services of a hali was largely inspired by his desire to work on the land as little as he could, to be exempt from activities which he thought disagreeable and in any case undignified. In other words, a hali was taken on primarily to replace the labour of the master and the members of his household, not to enlarge the total effort by his contribution.

As landlords (which is the point) it is the Anavil Brahmans who have become widely known, especially the category of the Desais, of whom the most prominent, the Pedivalas, resided in the small towns of south Gujarat and enjoyed great esteem as local representatives of Moghul rulers. The term landed nobility applies to them in so far as their income was derived from land and from land taxes.[20] They formed a

regional elite and were no longer physically concerned in agriculture. Illustrative of the impressive style in which these most prominent members of the dominant caste lived is a report of 1863 on the outcome of a conflict between the prince of Baroda and the Desai of the sub-district of Navsari. Thanks to the intercession of the British administration, the Desai, deprived of his rights as a revenue farmer, received in compensation almost Rs 200,000 and—a telling detail—annual payments of Rs 300 and Rs 1000 to allow him to keep a carriage and a palanquin.[21]

Less prominent, but still clearly landlords, were the Desais who acted as revenue farmers on a lower level—in one or two villages— and who had acquired the administrative powers conferred by this appointment.[22] For them, the regional elite was a reference group, with whom they were also allied through marriage ties. The landholdings of the village Desais never attained the size one would expect in a landed gentry, not the least reason for which was the sub-division of their property among all the sons. In their quality of landlords, these Desais remained active in agriculture, even if they confined themselves to supervision. They left the physical labour to their halis.

The great majority of the Anavil Brahmans belonged to the lower Bhathela category. These, too, were above the average as landholders, but they lacked the opportunities open to the Desais to augment their property legally or illegally as members of the local power elite. In every way these peasant Anavils were inferior to their Desai fellow caste members who controlled the village and in the pre-colonial period acted as representatives and confidential advisers to the regional elite. Whereas the indolent Desais, in their style of life, reminded the British government official of the zamindars in the north of India, the Bhathelas were praised by them as industrious and conscientious farmers.[23]

In the early nineteenth century a great distance separated the two categories, but they were not strictly held apart. It was always possible to pass from the Bhathela group into the Desai group and, similarly,

members of the latter could rise to greater eminence within their own status group.

The right and emoluments accompanying the quality of revenue farmer were, in south Gujarat, traditionally divisible and transmissible. The members of the family all participated equally in the influence and prosperity which the office of the Desai brought with it.[24] Moreover, that office could be transferred from the family by sale or sublease. In practice, the delegation or sale of rights was almost always restricted to fellow caste members—in other words, the office remained especially a prerogative of the dominant Anavils.[25] In the villages under their jurisdiction the high Desais appointed fellow caste members as deputies who had to collect the taxes for them, to keep order and to dispense justice. It was in this way that the more prosperous and influential Bhathelas, utilizing the coupling of function to position within the caste, graduated to the Desai category.

The introduction of a number of Anavils into the local administration, therefore, did not lead to final partition. Power and riches were not concentrated within a limited and closed group, but the benefits of desai-ship always remained open to individual Bhathelas who, when they succeeded, ultimately found recognition as Desais.

Apart from this, mobility was institutionalized in another way, i.e. in the relation of hypergamy between Desais and Bhathelas. A Bhathela was prepared to pay a large bride-price to marry his daughter to a member of the higher status group.[26] In this way the girl could look forward to a life of comfort. No longer would she be obliged to do peasant work, and in the household she would be assisted by servants. These considerations were not primarily inspired by fatherly care and affection: marriage was a family affair rather than a personal matter, and could place the Bhathela on a good footing with his prominent and influential fellow caste members. Such contact with Desais in itself already gave prestige and enabled the Bhathela to claim, if necessary, intercession and aid from the family into which he had married his

daughter.[27] The connections of his new relatives, finally, improved the Bhathela's chances of acquiring a desai-ship for himself.

It is not impossible that stabilization of the Desais' position under colonial rule would have led ultimately to complete prohibition of intermarriage between the two categories. There was no progressive differentiation, however, and in the last century a levelling process took place instead. It was precisely the great power and autonomy of the Desais that induced the colonial administrators not to make use of them as intermediaries, so that they lost much of their influence and wealth. Only with great difficulty did they adjust to the altered circumstances, and in many cases they went into debt.[28] Under the circumstances, hypergamy was actually a boon. Gifts from their Bhathela relatives by marriage made continuation of their often extravagant way of life possible.

The following moralizing quotation expresses very well the behaviour of the Desais and their attitude towards the Bhathelas:

> The Bhathella Desais, owing to their influence and cunning have succeeded hitherto in keeping the Government demand to a disproportionately low figure, which enables them to take less personal interest in the cultivation of the land. Hence all the fine masonry wells in Eroo are out of order, and the Deb, a weed which may be aptly called the Nemesis of improvident tillage, holds up its head to reprove the Desai, who thinks it beneath him to be a farmer or a landlord in the sense the Kaira Desai is. His pride takes another form, the pride of caste and privilege to marry 3 and 4 wives from the cultivating Bhatella class, who give him from 2000 to 4000 Rs to effect a settlement for their daughters in his home.[29]

After much squabbling, the British administration finally made a new arrangement for the Desais. On the advice of an enquiry committee, which made its report in 1865, the descendants of the former power elite received an annuity in compensation for the rights of which they had been deprived. These annuities, called *desaigiri* after their former remuneration, were paid until 1953. The amounts were small, the more

so as they had to be distributed among the ever-growing families. More important than the money, however, was the fact that the Desais could thereby legitimize and strengthen their claim to former importance.[30] Documents to show the rights formerly granted are still preserved with care. The solemnity and ostentation with which until recently the descendants of the Desais went to town on the annual payday to receive their annuity had no bearing on the few rupees to which they were entitled, but was meant as a pointed reminder to the other village inhabitants of the illustrious past of their families.

A background which made it clear that a family had politically influential ancestors remained a prestigious factor until this century, as did residence in a village traditionally known as a domain of the higher status group. But from the early nineteenth century onwards—fairly soon in the British part, later also in the principality of Baroda—the Desais were compelled to live exclusively on their property in land. They did this in accordance with their aristocratic ideas, that is, as landlords, and looked down contemptuously on those of their fellow caste members who, even though they employed a servant, had to work with him in the field.

The Anavil Brahman as a Patron

A landlord's style of life, not the function of desai, had become the most important standard of evaluation for the Anavils. Having one or more servants at one's disposal indicated a certain degree of prosperity and enabled the landowners to behave in a manner which rated high in the scale of values and which, though on a more modest footing and carrying less power, in fact guaranteed for this dominant group continuity with the past.

It was in this respect that the Bhathelas could more easily compete with the Desais than would have been possible in an earlier period. In contrast to the decline of the latter was the economic rise of the peasant Anavils in the nineteenth century. British reports of the period portray the Bhathelas as industrious and thrifty cultivators, but their efforts were aimed above all at imitating the Desais. They tried to ally

themselves to their more prominent fellow caste members by marriage. The gifts to the bridegroom's family and the wedding feast itself cost large sums of money. To organize the most sumptuous of feasts, lasting several days, was expensive but created an ineradicable remembrance and, in the eyes of the village and especially of all Anavils, served as a measure of the family's position.[31] Not only did the well-do-do Bhathelas use this device to improve their own position and create relations with the higher status group, but they also tried in general to behave like Desais. They used their earnings from the cultivation of sugarcane to enlarge their property holdings, not to increase production in order to maximize their income. A Bhathela who bought land did not do so with an eye to the market: he merely wished to be the equal of the Desais, for whom land was a prestige good rather than a capital good. A landlord's behaviour determined the perspective of the Anavils in this period, and the axiom they generally lived by was: the more the land, the higher the status. T.B. Naik wrote: 'It should be emphasized at this point that it is not monetary income but landed and other immovable and movable property that gives status among the Anavils. A man getting Rs 5,000/- per annum but having no land is much lower socially than another who has thirty acres of land giving an annual return of Rs 4,000/- . . . these classes (the Bhathelas) try to get into the higher ones by getting more money and turning this money into landed property.'[32] Purchase of land alone was not enough. To conform to the lifestyle of the Desais it was also necessary for the Anavils to limit their own physical work, to put an end to their wife's work in the field and to relieve her of all household duties except the preparation of meals and the care of the house altar.

This could only be done when the family took on at least one agricultural labourer in permanent services and delegated to him and the harekwali the most strenuous, unpleasant, and in part also impure tasks in the field and in the household. For the Bhathelas, too, it became increasingly true that esteem was accorded to him who led a comfortable life, who gave orders without having to work himself, whose wife had help in the household, who, in short, was a landlord in the same way as a Desai was. As the reports show, halis were recruited

in times of prosperity, when a growing number of Bhathelas could afford to withdraw wholly or in part from work on land and leave the toil to their servants.[33] When the economic tide turned, however, the number of halis diminished, and the masters were compelled once more to put their hand to the plough.[34] It is this alternation of extension and contraction of employment which suggests that the farm servant was to a large extent engaged for social reasons.

Although the process outlined above did much to equalize the two Anavil categories in the nineteenth century, it was chiefly the Desais who could afford a life of luxury. Their authority and wealth were undeniably affected by the government measures, but their lead was so great that only the more well-to-do Bhathelas could compete with them. Moreover, in the principality of Baroda, the Desais kept their prerogatives until the end of the century. The administrative reports contain frequent complaints of their continuing influence, especially at the village level.

While the Desais clung to their privileged position, the majority of the Bhathelas were still condemned to live and work as peasants. Many of them even had to make do without the services of a hali. How much they were weighed down by peasant work, and its consequences, too, for their social position, is reflected in the mockery of the following Anavil song:

> With an axe on his shoulder
> The husband look a Negro—
> I wonder why
> Father gave him his daughter.[35]

What was the cause of the Anavils' inclination to withdraw from all physical agricultural work? It seems reasonable to connect this attitude with their position in the ritual hierarchy as Brahmans, for whom agricultural labour, and physical work in general, are despised activities. 'The Anavil Brahmans, though intelligent and brave, are looked down upon by other Brahmans. The reason in this case is that the Anavils (as they are called by other castes) are agriculturalists and their women put

on shoes while carrying the men's meals to the fields.'[36] Handling the plough, especially, is looked upon as impure, and wherever in India landowning Brahmans employ farm servants, this rule is usually given in explanation. At first view a Brahman's wish to meet the demands of the Brahman ideal seems to be the chief, if not the only reason for withdrawing from agricultural work. With a farm servant at his disposal the Anavil could lead a life suitable to a member of a high caste.

As mentioned earlier, the farm servant and his wife, both on the field and in the master's household, carried out those tasks which elsewhere are left to the members of impure castes. Speaking of functional exchangeability as an attribute of the jajmani system, Gould remarks: 'A "clean" household cannot, by definition, retain its "clean" status unless certain kinds of work and ritual procedures with impure implications are transferred to others. If the traditional absorber of a specific form of impurity is not available, then the power and persuasion of the "clean" household must be employed to uncover someone else who will function as a substitute.'[37]

In the absence of impure castes—a very low percentage of the rural population in south Gujarat—Dublas are employed to take over various less favoured activities from those Anavils who have managed to improve their position.

To explain this as a desire for a Brahman way of life is only partly justified. In religious matters the Anavils are quite lax, and are not much concerned about the many rules to which as Brahmans they should subject themselves. In contrast to their respect for the Great Tradition as phrased in the holy scriptures they show little deference for the Brahman as village priest in their daily life. 'Though Brahmans, the whole body of Anavils are laymen who never carry out priestly duties or accept alms from others . . . The priesthood is unthinkable for them and considered below their dignity', wrote T.B. Naik.[38] Instead of aspiring to a secluded and puritanical life and recognizing obligations towards others by accepting gifts, the Anavils lord it over the village community. Their word is law for the other castes. In view of the central position

they have always occupied as prominent landowners and as the local power elite, it is in fact more plausible to regard Kshatriyas as the reference group of the Anavils. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they had the example of the Maratha rulers while in the principality of Baroda the Kshatriya model was preserved in the lifestyle of the upper stratum. As members of a dominant caste, the Anavils are comparable to rulers who have total authority over their subjects and who do not in the least detach themselves from their environment.[39]

It would, however, be going too far to explain the way of life of the Anavils one-sidedly in terms of a specific mode, coupled to a specific caste which they try to imitate. The behaviour of every dominant caste is unmistakably close to the Kshatriya ideal, but it does not necessarily have any reference to it. With equal justification it might be said that the ideal behaviour pattern of the Anavil Brahmans was influenced by the example traditionally given by the urban elite in their territory, an elite which included not only Moslem governors representing the Moghul rulers but also members of the highest sections of their own caste, the Pedivalas.[40]

If we apply this line of reasoning to the traditional village situation we may assume that the Anavil landowner's need of the services of a farm servant and his wife was in part ritually and in part socially determined. As soon as he could afford it he took a hali into his employ so that, as a member of the dominant caste, he could be free of physical work.

The Anavil with one or more farm servants no longer needed to work on the land and had acquired a position in which he could lead a life of conspicuous idleness, thus proving his superiority in the village community and in his own caste. Halis were for their master a symbol of the leisure which he enjoyed, but the master was not literally idle. He was continually busy enlarging his influence and reinforcing the commitment of his subordinates, while on the other hand he tried to damage, whether or not in coalition with others, the prestige and range of power of his peers.

In discussing the jajmani system I characterized the relationship between the members of the dominant caste and those of the other castes as one of patronage. The esteem enjoyed by the jajman was apparent from the size of his following. Landholding, chiefly concentrated in the dominant caste, was of decisive importance because, in view of the unequal distribution of property rights, it implied control of people. The clients shared in the crop, and some of them were also concerned in its production as tenants or agricultural labourers. To bind others and be assured of their dependence gratified the patron's self-esteem, but at the same time he could not dispense with it if he wished to be recognized as a prominent member of his caste and enjoy the attendant privileges.

In this light, it is not surprising that the social position of the Anavil Brahman was partly measured by the number of servants in his employ. By taking on more farm servants than he needed he reduced the proceeds of his holding. On the other hand, as his prestige was determined by the size of his property, not by the income he derived from it, he was evaluated by the number of his servants, not by the standard of whether, as a good cultivator, he knew how to use them in the most effective way in agrarian production.[41] *The question facing the Anavil landowner of the past was not how many servants he needed, but how many he could provide for.*

Extravagance in this respect was censured only when it caused the master's impoverishment. Living beyond his status, that is, taking on more farm servants than his economic capacity allowed, was bound to lead to loss of land, dismissal of halis, and in general, reduction of his group of clients. Economic decline was feared above all because it damaged the position of the landowner as patron.[42]

A massive following not only was a standard for conferring esteem upon the patron but also increased his power. This was of great importance especially in the pre-colonial period. Because of the unstable political situation of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the revenue farmers sometimes had to extort payment, and only he who was able to mobilize a following if necessary could act as Desai.

Connections with important people outside the village denoted a prominent position within it, and conversely. These Anavils, themselves influential patrons in the local community, were in their turn the clients of regional overlords to whom they owed assistance in case of conflicts. In their capacity of local power elite they profited by the weakening of central power. They began as mediators but became more and more autonomous; in the end they managed to build up a practically unassailable position and to exemplify as patrons the dominance of their caste.

In the course of nineteenth-century colonial rule, their supralocal power was curtailed. Within their village community, however, they remained completely sovereign. There, the members of the dominant caste vied with each other for the largest following in the village. In this situation of permanent rivalry, to have many followers at one's disposal was to be able to settle a feud by force if need be.[43] Under the circumstances, having several farm servants in the permanent nucleus of the client group bore witness to prudent foresight and was not at all an excessive luxury.

The power of the master rested on his ability to bind clients. It is not surprising that particularly the loyalty of the farm servants was beyond doubt. Placed low in the social and ritual hierarchy, little specialized and held in low esteem in their work, selected from an abundant supply, continually employed on the land or in the household of the master and therefore always at his disposal, these people were bound hand and foot.

In contrast to the members of the artisan and serving castes the Dubla servants had only one patron, of whom they were both the least favoured and, perforce, the most loyal clients. The least favoured since they carried out strenuous physical work and since, in a community in which obligations to others are to be avoided, their attachment to a master implied an extent of dependence that was looked upon as very demeaning.[44] If the members of the dominant caste were called the patrons *par excellence,* the dependence and subordination of clients is pre-eminently represented in the category of farm servants. In the

society of the time, no greater distance existed than that between the dominant Anavils and the lowly Dublas. The comprehensive inferiority of the latter lent even more lustre to the independence and superiority of the Anavil masters.

A patron-like behaviour was especially embodied in the way of life of the Desais. The system of prestige and power, in which the patronship of the members of the dominant caste was expressed, largely functioned in relation to the village community.[45] Because, by the end of the last century, landholding within the dominant caste became more equalized, an increasing number of Bhathelas successfully competed with the Desais. 'Lordly behaviour' and a 'kingly style', or whatever such an orientation is called, has traditionally been the behaviour that set the tone and was a worthy aim of Anavil Brahmans. In this century, however, it has become attainable by a growing number of the Desais' fellow caste members.

Administrative reports of the nineteenth century described the Anavils as rulers over the village population. Again and again we find complaints of the pressure exerted by them, and they are referred to as impertinent and quarrelsome. What the administrators regarded as stirring up trouble against the British and simple grievance-airing was really a symptom of the dominant position of the Anavils and of their mutual rivalry. Though intolerant of criticism directed against themselves, they are extremely outspoken and emphatic in their pronouncements on any subject, whether it concerns them or not. Their behaviour is in marked contrast with that of lower castes, which as a rule is characterized by humble wariness and the fear of unnecessarily committing oneself and irritating one's superiors. The bossiness of the patrons, reflecting their arrogance and self-importance, contrasts sharply with the sometimes abject servility of the clients. In the presence of British officials, the patrons in their turn had to feign submissiveness, which evidently they did not find easy.[46] In the village system, however, the Anavil's behaviour displays irascibility and superiority. He is wont to dwell emphatically on the stupidity and backwardness of other castes, whether members of those castes are

present or not. It is a consequence of their behaviour on the local level as Rajas, a term which they still acknowledge with a condescending smile.

The Dubla Farm Servant as Client

It has been pointed out that the hali could claim total though extremely sparing support from his master. As a kamin received his grain allowance irrespective of the service he had performed, so the hali was not remunerated on the basis of his merits but on that of his needs, which were rated low indeed. There being no contractual agreement related to a market situation, the allowance of the farm servant was not very flexible. This allowance—a more accurate term than 'wage'—was paid largely in kind and remained at the same minimal level throughout the last century. The patronship of the master was founded on the bondage of the hali. What he paid his Dubla farm servants always exceeded what they set against it in the form of labour, at any rate in his own calculation. The debt element, however, has been given undue importance in the literature. Writing about a similar service relationship in Uttar Pradesh, Singh remarks: 'The debt of a *harwaha* (comparable to a hali) is a fictitious asset of the money-lender. These people never take their debt seriously, for they know that their income being grossly inadequate, redemption of debt is out of the question. They look upon the money that they are able to borrow from the Zamindar as their "income". And the Zamindar too does not consider the money advanced to a harwaha a loan. He does not want the debt to be redeemed.'[47] As this quotation shows, instead of wishing to terminate the relation as soon as they could, both parties aimed at continuing it as long as possible. As already mentioned, the master did not want the debt repaid. He did not make a 'loan' to press for payment afterwards, but rather to be able subsequently to assert himself as a patron. He made it very clear who was the giving and who the receiving party, and in this way he impressed both gratitude and loyalty upon the farm servant. The size of a servant's debt was a measure of his commitment, of the control which could be exerted on him by the Anavil. The master repeatedly, and often on the basis of false figures,

told the Dubla that he got much more than he was entitled to. In this way he managed at once to demonstrate his liberality and to emphasize his servant's dependence, in short, to behave like a patron.

Nor did the hali work to pay off his debt, as has often been suggested, for to be an unattached agricultural labourer was the last thing he wanted. Instead of keeping his debt low, the farm servant tried to exploit his privileged position and move his master to do him as many favours as possible. He appealed constantly to the Anavil's beneficence. By working on his sense of honour as a patron, by badgering him for extra compensation and pressing for all kinds of remuneration, he stimulated the master, as it were, to be liberal and to make a show of behaving like a good master. The farm servant was undoubtedly aware of the fact that by so acting he increased his dependence, but he accepted it as inevitable and considered himself entitled to protection.[48]

On the other hand, providing for the material needs of his farm servant was not the only obligation of the master. The protection offered by the Anavil to his hali reached far beyond giving him a living: he had to guarantee his existence in a much wider sense. This meant that the master should defend the social interests of his servant and that he was held responsible to some extent for all actions of his subordinate.[49] Consequently, the hali of a prominent Anavil patron was assured of a reasonable amount of security and protection. For his part, he had to behave loyally, that is, do nothing that might provoke the displeasure of his master. Should conflicts arise, he was expected to take his master's side, even if it meant opposing his fellow caste members, the Dubla clients of the other Anavils.

As has been explained, the client enhanced the prominence of his patron. Apart from loyalty, the Dubla owed his Anavil master respect and submissiveness. His humbleness in word and gesture alone was sufficient to accentuate the superiority of the master. Old Anavil informants spoke to me of the great deference and timidity with which they used to be approached by the Dublas, while they censured severely the 'impertinence' and 'unmannerliness' of the agricultural labourers of today.[50]

The Anavil's superiority was reinforced in a religious context when, for instance, at a marriage or a death in the house of his patron, the hali participated in the ceremonies in a clearly subordinate and servile way. This behaviour was both a solemn confirmation of the tie between master and servant and an indication of the distance which separated them.

The dependence of the Dubla servants far exceeded that of the patron's clients who belonged to other castes. The Dublas had to rely on the benevolence of their masters for everything. The farm servant had no one else to turn to for favours; his Anavil master was the only one who was prepared to help him if he was in difficulties, but at the same time no one else could thwart and harass him as the master could.[51] Naturally this far-reaching bondage in the purely economic sense helped to inculcate loyalty and discipline in the farm servant, but it would be incorrect to suppose that only pressure could have induced him to go to such lengths.

Considering the weak position in which the hali found himself in all respects, it was in his own interest to side with his Anavil patron. By leaving no doubt of his loyalty, at least in his behaviour, the Dubla hoped in his turn to compel his master to protect him. If in his attitude and behaviour the farm servant also honoured his Anavil as a benefactor in an exaggerated way, he did it partly to remind him of his obligations as a patron and to spur him to magnanimity.

Moreover, and this is characteristic of a relationship of patronage, the Dubla strengthened his own position in relation to third parties by identifying himself emphatically with his Anavil. The esteem and influence enjoyed by the master were shared by the servant, for a little of the farmer's importance was reflected upon his subordinate.

Earlier in this article it was maintained that bondage was attractive to the Dublas on account of the economic security it offered. Because of their contacts with the rich and powerful villagers and the privileges and protection that these contacts afforded them, the Dubla farm servants also rated higher in social esteem than their fellow caste members. The unattached labourers among the Dublas, some sources

state, were even despised. 'It has become a matter of prestige in the Dubla community to be a hali, to work for a Dhaniamo. As a woman without having married a husband has no prestige in society, similarly a Halpati without a Dhaniamo as his master has no prestige in his community.'[52]

The loyalty of the farm servant was said to be a byword. In the stereotype so stubbornly maintained by Anavils, the Dubla would go through fire and water for his master and identified his master's interest with his own. He could be counted upon to carry out as well as he could any instruction the master chose to give him. Attachment to a prominent Anavil gave the Dubla security and prestige, and the Dubla was devoted to him, if only for this reason. According to some authors, he was filled with contempt for those who deserted their dhaniamo.

> Loyalty to the master figured as an important item in their moral code. They looked down upon those who were not and very often would not have anything to do with such deserters. The master on the other hand always appreciated this loyalty and put a premium on it by raising the status of his faithful dubla. There was not much of material reward but the labourer was admitted more and more into the confidence of the master, given a freer hand in his work, allowed a sort of familiarity and intimacy with the master's family and was trusted with work of a more delicate nature than that of a purely agricultural labourer.[53]

Owing to the frequent and intensive contacts between master and servant their relation lost much of its rigidity and stiffness, and came to bear a markedly personal stamp. The hali was the master's confidant. Being charged with the routine work he bore more responsibility than the casual labourers. Regarding all important agricultural questions the servant was consulted by his master, and the trust the latter put in him was apparent from his independence in carrying out orders. The hali knew about all kinds of intimate family details of his Anavil which were hidden from outsiders and had to remain so. Even now every Anavil family can illustrate with incidents from the past the affection and loyalty of its former Dubla servants, which incidentally also enhance

the glory of its own patronship. Such moving stories about the geniality governing the service relationship can usually be traced to an Anavil source and are not very convincing, if only for this reason.

Halipratha: A System of Unfree Labour Mitigated by Patronage

It is not difficult to recognize that servitude cannot have been so harmonious a relationship as is sometimes suggested in retrospect. The stress was on the 'good' master and the 'good' servant, that is, on the Anavil who carried out his obligations without stint or chicanery, and the Dubla who served his master loyally. Rather than the actual behaviour it was the ideal relationship of dhaniamo and hali that was described, presumably on the strength of Anavil sources. Obviously the Anavils wished to create the impression that they treated their servants excellently. As patrons, moreover, they wanted to leave no doubt of their clients' loyalty.

Nor did the Dublas themselves, on being interviewed, give any evidence of dissatisfaction, sometimes to the rather naive-sounding astonishment of British government officials. As I explained, bondage was accompanied by many advantages, which partly compensated for the lack of liberty. But the servant had to avoid any semblance of impertinent action and behave in all respects as a subordinate and dependent. Open doubt of the master's good intentions, denial of his pretensions, was highly improper because it detracted from the Anavil's dominance. The hali should show himself satisfied and obedient. However, if the master refused to meet the obligations which had been established by custom, the hali could remind him of them by a show of indifference and indolence, or by remonstrating with his master in front of others. On the other hand, if the Dubla exceeded the limits of self-defence it might cost him dear.

Many reports of the nineteenth century asserted that the servants rarely ran away, but this, too, should not be adduced as proof of cordial relations between them and their master. To have a master meant for the Dubla to belong to the privileged category among the Dublas. The

hali who deserted his master relinquished his social security, which he would do only in extremity. And where else could he have found work? In the traditional society, employment outside agriculture was extremely scarce. Moreover, the local isolation, a consequence of the poorly developed system of communications, made it difficult for him to judge the possible demand for labour elsewhere. But if alternative employment suddenly materialized nearby, he seized his chance with alacrity. In the 1860s, for instance, many farm servants left their masters when labour was needed for the construction of the railroad through the plains of south Gujarat.[54]

Such unexpected and temporary possibilities of escape aside, a hali decamped only if feelings had run too high. Practically the only way in which he could defend himself was by trying to withdraw completely from his master's authority. Precisely because this meant a total breach it was a step that the farm servant certainly would not take lightly, and moreover, it little profited the Dubla. At best he might succeed in finding a better master, but this prospect was too uncertain to warrant his severing the relation hastily.

Sometimes, however, the hali ran away on the instigation of another Anavil. As already mentioned, the relation between the most prominent members of the dominant caste as patrons was one of mutual rivalry. The master who could not keep his servants lost prestige. This was the more painful for him if a hali had been induced to leave his master to serve another Anavil in his own or a neighbouring village. The code of the Anavils forbade such illegal transfer of a servant, and their caste *panch* saw to it that the rule was observed. The Anavil who engaged a hali who had left another master without the latter's permission was fined, and the Dubla himself was punished by caning. Yet it is difficult in retrospect to judge the effectiveness of these sanctions.

When a breach was not due to the struggle for power between competing patrons with the hali as prize, the hali could do little but fly from the village. Usually he went to the village of his mother or his wife, but he was not safe there. When informal collaboration between the Anavil Brahmans did not lead to his being brought back, the local

authorities helped to trace runaway halis. In the first half of the nineteenth century, running away even rendered a hali liable to punishment by law.[55] Later, complaints about disloyal Dublas were no longer admitted, and officially the master could not do much against a runaway servant. The actual situation, however, had not changed a great deal. The Anavils remained the most important power elite in the principality of Baroda, and in the British part of south Gujarat police functionaries and other local government servants were recruited from their midst. This meant that the masters could still informally appeal to the local authorities to compel a runaway Dubla to return.

Thus the Anavil landlords seem to have had the halis completely in their power. The members of the tribal and landless Dubla caste had no choice but to put themselves in the keeping of a master. This explains at the same time why the relationship began and continued with the approval of the servant. The tie attaching him to the master became increasingly close, and only on the master's initiative could it be severed. It is true that in this course of time the amount of support to which the hali was entitled had become standardized, but if necessary he had to accept less. The exceedingly unequal division of mutual rights and obligations was due to the difference in position between dhaniamo and hali. In theory, the right of the servant was the obligation of the master, but the former was not guaranteed in any way. The great economic, political, and social power of the Anavil made it possible for him to dictate, and in any case interpret, the service conditions one-sidedly. His obligations were rather in the nature of favours to be granted as he thought fit. The paternalistic attitude of the master could barely conceal the elements of enforcement that were inherent in the relationship. The servant was at his master's beck and call. Together with his family he had to comply with the latter's every wish, which might include sexual intercourse with the hali's wife.

On the other hand, the element of patronage prevented any pronounced tyranny and complete exploitation, which would have detracted from the esteem in which the Anavil was held. Then, too, he had to rely on the support of his following. The patron's position stood

or fell by his willingness to provide for and aid a group of followers, to let them participate in his goods, his power, and his esteem. The master must carry out a minimum of the obligations he owed to his servant. In the end, it was on the latter's labour that the success of the crop depended. In the traditional agrarian system, patronage not only served as a corrective to the lopsided distribution of scarce goods in traditional village India, but also accentuated inequality in all spheres of life. The presence and the symbols of subordination of the clients enabled the patron to demonstrate his superiority. As the economic and ritual distance between them widened, the relationship came to contain an element of exploitation, which in the case of the low-class agricultural labourers was mitigated only by the mutual intimacy and sympathy inherent in the personal, usually hereditary tie with the landlord's family. In the concept of *patrimoniale Herrschaft* (patrimonial rule), Weber, perhaps harking back to his investigation into the conditions of agricultural labourers in the German provinces east of the Elbe River at the end of the last century, characterized the relationship in the following words:

> The master 'owes' the subject something as well, not juridically, but morally. Above all—if only in his own interest—he must protect him against the outside world, and help him in need. He also must treat him 'humanely', and especially he must restrict the exploitation of his performance to what is 'customary'. On the ground of a domination whose aim is not material enrichment but the fulfilment of the master's own needs, he can do so without prejudicing his own interest because, as his needs cannot expand qualitatively and, on principle, unlimitedly, his demands differ only quantitatively from those of his subjects. And such restriction is positively useful to the master, as not only the security of his domination, but also its results greatly depend on the disposition and mood of the subordinates. The subordinate morally owes the master assistance by all the means available to him.[56]

In south Gujarat it was the Anavil Brahmans who, as the dominant landowners, regulated the distribution of agrarian produce. It would be wrong to conclude that instead of production based on profit for a few,

fulfilment of the material needs of all was aimed at. The Anavils were not altruistic to that extent. A more plausible explanation is rather that, for the landlords, maximization of income took second place to maximization of prestige and power, which in the nineteenth century amounted to behaviour as a patron in the village. This objective required a minimal fulfilment of the need of clients for aid and protection. At that time, the Dubla halis were objects in the endeavour of the members of the dominant caste to acquire more power and esteem, not subjects in a surplus-oriented market economy. An important factor in this process was the effort of the Bhathelas to attain the same position as the Desais partly by taking halis into their employ, which enabled them to imitate the lifestyle of the higher status group.

On the basis of all these considerations it can be concluded that servitude in south Gujarat during the nineteenth century was essentially a form of unfree labour that was complicated and mitigated by a relationship of patronage.

Abbreviations

A.A. *American Anthropologist*

A.I. *America Indigena*

B.J.S. *The British Journal of Sociology*

B.T.L.V. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde*

C.I.S. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*

C.S.S.H. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*

E.A. *Eastern Anthropologist*

ETHN. *Ethnology*

E.W. *Economic Weekly* (continued as *Economic and Political*

Weekly, E.P.W.)

H.O. *Human Organization*

I.E.S.H.R. *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*

I.J.A.E. *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*

I.J.S.W. *Indian Journal of Social Work*

I.S. *Indian Sociologist*

J.A.F. *Journal of American Folklore*

J.G.R.S. *Journal of Gujarat Research Society*

J.U.B. *Journal of the University of Bombay*

M.I. *Man in India*

S.B. *Sociological Bulletin*

S.G. *Sociologische Gids*

S.R.–N.S. *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government, New Series*

S.W.J.A. *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*

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5

Caste and Labour

Untouchable Social Movements in Urban Uttar Pradesh in the Early Twentieth Century*

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In an article entitled *'Chhote aur Bade ka Sawal'* (The Question of the Big and the Small People), written in 1938, Kashi Baba, a Kanpur millworker, introduced the 'big person' as Shoshak Chand. A *shoshak* is an exploiter, and Chand is the colloquial version of Chandra, a common middle name of higher castes. The 'small person', he called Dalit Ram. Ram is a widely used second name of untouchables, while the term 'dalit', literally the downtrodden, had gradually come to denote low-caste Sudras in the early twentieth century. Kashi Baba described Shoshak Chand as a wealthy person, capable of '*chori*' or stealing, not in the sense of thieving, but as one who deprived people like Dalit Ram and thus became rich. He was also educated and, therefore, ' *shakti-shali*' or powerful, for he was able to deceive and dominate Dalit Ram by dint of his education. Kashi Baba also presented Sita Ram Bajpaye, a high-caste person, to whom Maikulal was always forced to be subservient, the latter being an untouchable Sudra and considered to be 'low'.[1] In identifying the

differences between the 'big' and the 'small' people, Kashi Baba thus indicated low-caste status as a significant mark and determinant of being poor, illiterate, and powerless. In this, he postulated a specific perspective from which the nature of caste relations and their implications were perceived in the 1930s.

This view, expressed in Kashi Baba's exposition, underpinned religious and social reform movements which developed among untouchables in the early twentieth century in some towns of Uttar Pradesh (U.P). In this period untouchable ideologues, who spearheaded social movements against caste distinctions, challenged, in particular, social division of labour based on ritual status—this, they argued, prevented occupational diversification and in turn precipitated material deprivation, powerlessness, and lack of education. Such attacks on the caste system were expressed through a revival of medieval bhakti devotionalism, a rejection of vedic Hinduism, and an assertion of a pre-Aryan racial origin of the untouchables. Bhakti was held to be an egalitarian pre-vedic religion practised by the original inhabitants of India, the Adi Hindus, from whom the untouchables began to trace their lineage. It was further claimed that the Aryan invaders had subjugated the Adi Hindus and imposed menial work and low untouchable status on them by devising the Hindu caste hierarchy. The context for social movements among untouchables was set primarily by two interrelated factors: first, the relaxation of caste subordination in occupational relations, as untouchable migrants from the countryside were incorporated in the urban workforce, while, at the same time, the labour market was segmented along the lines of caste; and secondly, the emergence of new theories about the nature and origin of the caste system, put forward variously by Hindu religious and social reformers, Christian missionaries or British ethnographers. This essay discusses the changing experience of caste distinctions in the towns and the role they played in the genesis of untouchable caste movements and in shaping their ideologies. The specific focus of analysis will be on the ways in which the relation between ritual status and work was questioned in the course of caste movements. This study is based on

four of the largest towns in U.P.—Allahabad, Benares, Kanpur, and Lucknow.

Untouchables in the Urban Milleu: The Bhakti Resurgence

The devotional religion of bhakti, propounded by such gurus (teachers) as Kabir and Ravidas, had enjoyed widespread popularity in north India between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, bhakti religious cults had grown more exclusive and survived primarily as religious orders of sadhus or mendicants.[2] At the end of the nineteenth century, bhakti sects in rural areas were closed groups, which practised secrecy in their activities and followed strict rites of initiation.[3] In the early twentieth century, adherence to bhakti religion and veneration of Kabir and Ravidas became widespread among urban untouchable migrants in U.P., and ceased to be practised only by insular religious orders. From the turn of the century, many untouchables in the towns began to call themselves *bhagats,* a term which denoted lay followers of bhakti cults, persons who were not ascetics.[4]

What was the social context of bhakti resurgence among the untouchables in the U.P. towns? From the late nineteenth century, untouchable caste groups from rural areas had begun to migrate to Allahabad, Benares, Kanpur, and Lucknow, where demand for the menial services they performed was expanding. After the uprising of 1857 and its suppression, British military and civil administrations were consolidated in the towns and army cantonments, and civil stations were reconstituted on a larger scale. To accommodate these, as well as for the settlement of Indian professional groups and government servants who converged on the towns, urban built-up areas extended substantially.[5] Urban territorial growth was coupled with the expansion of sanitary infrastructure and municipal services,[6] which created a demand for scavengers, sweepers, and conservancy workers. Moreover, British bureaucrats, civil servants, and military personnel, who settled

in the towns, required domestic servants and retainers. Untouchable groups, such as Mehtars, Bhangis, Chamars, and Doms, who traditionally performed menial work, found jobs in cantonments and civil lines and with the municipalities. In Kanpur, Chamars and Mochis, traditionally leather-workers, were also employed by the newly-developing leather factories and tanneries set up by the government and British industrialists.[7]

The pattern of employment of untouchable rural migrants in the towns marked a change from their past economic and social relations of work in the countryside. In the towns, the untouchables ceased to be servile labourers of the higher castes, and worked instead as paid municipal employees or domestic servants of the British, and at times in factories.[8] This did not necessarily bring them affluence or economic self-sufficiency, but the nature of the urban occupations of untouchables came to undermine direct caste-subordination at work. Though wage employment was not free from economic conflict and exploitation, yet it could give rise to a sense of liberation among dominated caste groups, for whom caste subordination had been the prominent social experience in rural areas. This did not, however, mean that social distinctions based on caste dissolved in the towns.

The experience of segregation and exclusion of the untouchables in rural life was not reversed in the urban context. They were absorbed almost entirely in ill-paid, menial service jobs or in work connected with handling leather, in keeping with their traditional 'low' or 'impure' occupations,[9] and alternative avenues of employment for them were virtually non-existent. Touchable Hindu low-caste groups had a near-monopoly over manual work in the trading sector, for high-caste Hindu merchants seldom employed untouchables in the bazaars and *mandis* (urban retail and wholesale markets).[10] Nor were the untouchables able to venture into trades and occupations, other than the 'impure' ones they traditionally pursued, such as leather work. This was, however, not entirely because of their low status, but was also due to their general poverty and lack of capital, even to undertake petty trading. The untouchables also had very little opportunity to enter educational

institutions, both because they were unable to afford the expense and because these institutions were usually unwilling to accept untouchable students. Being mostly illiterate, they were seldom employed in the lower government services in clerical posts. Before 1934, they were not recruited to the subordinate ranks of the polices force.[11]

Occupational divisions along caste lines, prevalent in the rural situation, were thus being replicated in urban areas, notwithstanding the relaxation of direct caste-domination in employment relations. This could generate or accentuate a sense of ritual discrimination among untouchables, especially when juxtaposed against a new experience of independence at work. Occupational distinctions were coupled with spatial segregation of the untouchables in terms of residential settlement patterns. The untouchables had lived on the village periphery; in the towns they similarly had no access to the residential areas of higher castes. Untouchable settlements were concentrated in secluded pockets on urban outskirts, in unreclaimed, insanitary areas, almost invariably devoid of water supply and conservancy facilities, or in the isolated niche of servants' quarters in cantonments and civil stations. In the rare cases when untouchables lived in urban slum complexes along with people of other castes, their houses formed separate blocks.[12] Caste distribution in urban neighbourhoods thus also provided ample expression of caste distinctions.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, therefore, the untouchable migrants to the towns were exposed to two contrary trends. On the one hand, caste-domination ceased, to a large extent, to be a feature of occupational relations. It would be reasonable to surmise that this was also likely to have created expectations and aspirations for economic advancement, improved living conditions, and education. On the other hand, continued caste-distinctions in employment or educational opportunities and settlement patterns, as well as their general poverty, thwarted economic or social improvement among untouchables. Moreover, the way in which the higher castes viewed the untouchables had clearly not changed. The two simultaneous processes appear to have created an urgency among the urban untouchables to

assert themselves and to undermine caste barriers, for it was amongst them in the early twentieth century in the towns that bhakti cults gained a large following.[13] That the idiom of their self-assertion took the form of bhakti is not surprising, for bhakti encapsulated a message of the social equality of all castes. It was a way of worshipping God through devotion and personal communion, in which one's caste was eliminated or became irrelevant, as all were considered to be equal in the eyes of God.

When untouchables began to call themselves *bhagats,* many attached this epithet before their names. They often added the terms Kabirpanthi, Shivnarayani, or Ravidas after their names to indicate the gurus whom they revered. They projected themselves as adherents of bhakti by wearing necklaces of beads, called *kanthis,* which were distinctive marks of bhakti sects, in contrast to the Brahmanical sacred thread or *janeyu.*[14] When the untouchable migrants settled in the towns, they reconstituted caste panchayats (councils of elders) in urban neighbourhoods, which dealt with internal disputes among members of caste groups and stipulated the religious and social practices to be observed. Many of these panchayats were renamed after bhakti gurus, such as the Ravidas Chamar Panchayats in all the towns.

Temples dedicated to bhakti gurus were also being refurbished or newly constructed in the early twentieth century. These temples were neighbourhood shrines, set up gradually over extended periods on the initiative of local priests or the panchayats, and financed by small donations from members of the caste groups.[15] A Shivnarayani Sant Sampradaya was initiated in Allahabad by the untouchable Chamars, who worked in the British cantonment as horse-keepers, gardeners, and domestic servants.[16] In Benares, an old Shivnarayani temple was repaired for worship by the growing number of devotees. Regular readings of *Gyan Dipak,* a religious book written by Swami Shivnarayan, were organized at the temple.[17] In Kanpur, a Shivnarayani temple had been set up in a low-caste neighbourhood in Colonelganj.[18] Two Kabirpanthi temples had also been erected in Kanpur at the

Chamar *mohallas* (neighbourhoods) of Benajhaber Idgah Colony and Collectorganj. The former was set up by the local panchayat and the latter by a *mahant*, who slowly raised money by holding religious ceremonies and congregations *(bhandaras),* where small subscriptions were offered by the devotees.[19] In Lucknow, a Ravidas temple was gradually constructed between 1924 and 1933 as contributions trickled in from worshippers. The temple was set up by Baba Sita Ram Das Sant, under the auspices of the Ravidas Chamar Panchayat.[20] In a Dom *mohalla* in Benares, by 1929, a bhakti temple had been erected by Gopi Dom, a panchayat headman. The temple was dedicated to Shubeshwar Mahadev (Siva), who had come to be regarded as a pre-Aryan deity, personifying bhakti. On the four corners of the temple, busts were placed of such well-known bhakti saints as Ravidas, Supa Bhagat, Sevri Bhaktin, and Nabhji Bhagat.[21] Neighbourhood celebrations and town-wide processions on the occasion of the birth anniversaries of bhakti gurus had also begun to be organized by the 1920s.[22] Regular religious congregations, *satsangs* and *bhajans*, were held in the untouchable neighbourhoods and at bhakti temples, where devotional songs were sung and teachings of the gurus were discussed.

What was the significance of bhakti to the urban untouchables in the early twentieth century? Low-caste status had assumed a specific relevance in the towns for the close correspondence between caste divisions and the occupational structure and spatial distribution of population. Such divisions, of course, existed in the countryside, but, in the towns caste distinctions had more direct implications for the access of untouchables to work and housing. Ritual distinctions here came into the basic sources of livelihood and living conditions. Moreover, the awareness of the untouchables about such ritual distinctions in occupational opportunities were heightened by the slackening of caste subordination at work. Within this context, bhakti came to be practised more extensively by the urban untouchables from the early twentieth century, as a form of denial of caste distinctions. For the untouchables in the towns, the message of caste equality in bhakti gave them a means

to question the discriminations and disabilities that they continued to face.

It is significant that bhakti re-emerged in the twentieth century essentially as a religious practice of the untouchables. This was a departure from medieval bhakti, which had flourished among religious cults or sects not identified with any particular caste group, even though lower castes had been the prominent adherents. This had continued to be the case until the end of the nineteenth century.[23] In contrast, twentieth-century bhakti was resurrected as a caste-based religious expression solely of the untouchables. This newly-emerging notion of bhakti as an egalitarian religion exclusive to the untouchables developed into a religious movement in the early 1920s, which argued that bhakti was the religion of the original inhabitants and rulers of India, the Adi Hindus, from whom the untouchables claimed to have descended.[24] Underlying the argument of Adi Hindu ancestry was the central assertion that the social division of labour based on caste status was an imposition forced on Indian society by the Aryan conquerors, who had subjugated the Adi Hindu rulers and made them servile labourers. While bhakti posited caste equality, the emerging Adi Hindu ideology constructed a theory of the ancient racial origin of untouchables in order to attack the links between low-caste status and particular forms of labour.

Emergence of Adi Hinduism: Ideological and Political Context

Bhakti revivalism and Hinduism developed within a social context of urbanization, the changing significance of caste distinctions for the untouchables in the towns, and their attempts at self-assertion, However, the catalysts for rethinking about the caste system were the political and intellectual cross-currents of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when caste-uplift movements and various theories about the caste system developed and lent themselves to elaboration and reinterpretation by untouchable ideologues. The growing familiarity of the untouchables, especially of a newly-literate section

among them, with the ideas preached by religious reformist groups like the Arya Samaj or by Christian missionaries, as well as deliberations about the representation of caste and religious communities in government and political institutions, accelerated the development of urban low-caste social movements from the 1920s.

The Adi Hindu ideology was formulated in the 1920s by a new generation of literate untouchables. Their growing interest in bhakti religion had generated among the untouchables a need for literacy, in order to acquaint themselves with religious scriptures and the writings of the gurus. Attempts to gain literacy were also prompted by the teachings of medieval bhakti saints, who had preached the need for knowledge as a way to religious salvation.[25] Moreover, bhakti revivalism among the untouchables went hand-in-hand with efforts to improve their social and economic conditions, for which literacy was considered to be a prerequisite. Education was highly valued, for a prevalent notion was that illiteracy was a cause both of the untouchables' social domination by the educated higher castes, and of their exclusion from better jobs and opportunities.[26] Some untouchables had acquired elementary literacy from Christian missionaries in the cantonments or civil stations. Others, born in the 1880s and 1890s to untouchable parents who had migrated to the towns, were sent to municipal schools, in so far as the parents could afford the expense.

Bhakti resurgence thus produced a generation of literate untouchables, who emerged to be the leaders and ideologues of the Adi Hindu movement. Swami Acchutanand (1879–1933), one of the most prominent Adi Hindu leaders in the 1920s and 1930s, was brought up at a military cantonment, where his father worked, and later settled in Kanpur. He had been taught by missionaries and had gained an extensive knowledge of religious texts.[27] Ram Charan (1888–1938), an Adi Hindu leader of Lucknow, was born in a slum at Gwaltoli in Kanpur. His parents were casual labourers, but were able to send him to school. Later, he went to Lucknow, where he briefly worked in the

Railway Audit Office to earn money to attend night school and eventually to take a degree in law.[28]

By the 1910s, literate but usually not wealthy men, like Acchutanand and Ram Charan, had become concerned with the issue of caste uplift. Some among them joined the Arya Samaj, which was promising to facilitate the social uplift of lower castes, set up schools for them, and presented the hope of surmounting caste divisions by allowing untouchables to enter the Hindu caste hierarchy through 'purification', or *shudhhi*.[29] In the early 1920s, however, the literate Arya Samajist untouchables broke away from the Samaj and put forward the argument that the untouchables were Adi Hindus. The immediate impetus behind this development came from shifts in the activities of the Arya Samaj. From the early 1920s, in the aftermath of the Khilafat movement, in response to the religious ferment it generated among Muslims, and in an attempt to strengthen the Hindu community, the Arya Samaj stepped up its *shuddhi* or reclamation activities for the inclusion, back into the Hindu fold, of lower castes and Hindu converts to Islam.[30]

The Samaj, in this period, increasingly found itself drawn into political action in defence of Hinduism, and attempted to highlight certain religious idioms to unite Hindus. The symbol that the Samaj usually upheld was the Vedas, which were projected as the ultimate container of religious truths.[31] The growing emphasis on the Vedas by the Arya Samaj, however, implied the fortification of caste distinctions on which the Vedas were based. This gradually disillusioned the untouchables who had joined it, especially because the Samaj did not accord them equality of status, even though it admitted lower castes to the Hindu hierarchy through *shuddhi*. The distinction between high-caste Hindus and the 'purified' low castes had remained.[32]

The untouchable Arya Samajists gradually became convinced that the Samaj acted as the 'army of high-caste Hindus', whose only intention was to rally the Hindu community against the Muslims, and that the Samaj's attempt to uplift the lower castes was merely a part of this strategy. They argued that the Samaj did not aim to eradicate

untouchability and that *shuddhi* was a cunning ploy to perpetuate the hold of the higher castes over the untouchables.[33] Swami Acchutanand in a speech claimed that the Samaj aimed 'to make all Hindus slaves of the Vedas and the Brahmans.'[34] It was also from this period that the political reforms of 1919, introduced by the British government, brought into sharper focus the issue of the relative numerical strength of various religious groups, as the principle of communal representation was fully recognized.

This further prompted the untouchables of the Arya Samaj to conclude that the intensification of *shuddhi* and caste-uplift programmes of the Samaj were motivated by intentions to increase the number of Hindus. Ram Charan argued that 'in 1919 reforms came and representation was given according to population; those religious groups who are more numerous get more places; and then what else but *achchhutoddhar* [uplift of untouchables] conferences everywhere to uplift untouchables.'[35] In the early 1920s, therefore, many of the literate untouchables arrived at the conclusion that alliance with the Arya Samaj and attempts to gain entry into the Hindu caste hierarchy would not further the interests of the untouchables, and they dissociated themselves from the Samaj.[36] In search of a new ideology to repudiate vedic Hinduism and the caste system, they drew upon bhakti and formulated the ideology of Adi Hinduism.

Based on the notion of bhakti as the exclusive religion of the untouchables, the leaders developed their own interpretation of the history of Indian religions and of the historical roots of untouchability. However, for their reconstruction of the history of untouchables, the ideologues also referred to sources other than bhakti religion. The various intellectual influences on Acchutanand, one of the chief Adi Hindu preachers, described by his biographer, indicate how the Adi Hindu ideology was formulated.[37] The foremost influence was naturally that of the Arya Samaj. The Arya Samaj had introduced the concept of *shuddhi* or reconversion in Hinduism. An argument underlying the *shuddhi* was that Hindus had been forcibly converted to Islam by the Muslim conquerors and rulers in medieval India, and that these

converts were to be reclaimed by Hinduism. Acchutanand adopted this central explanation of the forcible imposition of a religion. He projected it backwards to the vedic age to argue that the Aryan invaders had subjugated and imposed vedic Hinduism on the original Indians, the Adi Hindus, and deprived them of their bhakti religion, which they had supposedly practised prior to the advent of the Aryans. According to his biographer, Acchutanand had also read R.C. Dutt's Bengali translation of the *Rg Veda,* and had discussed religious issues with the missionaries of the Theosophical Society and with Jain and Buddhist sadhus. The biographer stated that, from these various sources, Acchutanand had become aware of the racial and religious differences between the Aryans and the pre-Aryans. He had concluded from accounts of warfare in Hindu religious texts between *dasyus* or *asuras* (demons) and Aryan gods, that these were references to the conquest of ancient pre-Aryan races of India by the Aryan invaders.

It is possible that Acchutanand and other Adi Hindu leaders in U.P. may have been aware of the Adi Dravida movement in Madras or the Ad Dharm movement in the Punjab around the same time, with whom the idea of an original race could have been shared. However, there is no evidence to suggest any links between these various Adi' movements in their initial stages,[38] and it is more likely that the theory of a separate racial origin of untouchables in the various simultaneous Adi' movements was derived from British ethnographic classifications of Indians into ethnic groups, and from a related notion that the caste system originated through encounters between Dravidian and Aryan races. These racial theories had gained widespread publicity, especially with the various censuses.[39] The acquaintance of the urban untouchables with Christian missionaries, who were propagating the concept of the original races of India and the theory of the genesis of the caste system among an Aryan minority, was another significant source of these ideas.[40]

Soon after their rift with the Arya Samaj in the early 1920s, the untouchable leaders began to propagate the concept of an Adi Hindu original race and bhakti as their separate, pre-Aryan religion. A book

entitled *Mool Bharatbasi aur Arya* (Original Inhabitants of India and Aryans) was published, written by Swami Bodhanand. The Kumbh Mela at Allahabad of 1928–9 saw the most strident proclamation of Adi Hinduism. At the *mela*, a *mahotsav* or great festival of all Adi Hindu bhakti *sant panths* (devotional sects) was held, in which Kabirpanthi, Ravidas, and Shivnarayani groups participated.[41] By 1924, local Adi Hindu Sabhas (associations) had been organized in Kanpur, Lucknow, Benares, and Allahabad to spread the message of Adi Hinduism, the initiative being taken by literate untouchables and bhakti religious preachers. Each Sabha had its *pracharaks* and *upadeshaks,* modelled on Christian missionaries and Arya Samajist preachers, who regularly visited untouchable neighbourhoods.

The emphasis of the Adi Hindu movement was not, however, on formal organization, but on shared religious sympathy between the Adi Hindu preachers and local untouchable groups who practised bhakti. Various panchayats and caste groups in their neighbourhoods were informally associated with the Adi Hindu Sabhas of the towns or with individual leaders. Adi Hindu preachers were regularly invited to address meetings of local caste panchayats and bhakti religious congregations. The meetings of panchayats were occasions for discussions about Adi Hinduism. The Ravidas Chamar panchayats in Kanpur, for instance, acknowledged Acchutanand as the leader of their community in the 1920s, and Chamars of Kanpur in large numbers attended meetings convened by the Adi Hindu Sabha and addressed by Acchutanand.[42] Sweepers in Kanpur, in August 1925, were reported to have organized meetings, where Acchutanand was invited to preside in his capacity as an Adi Hindu leader.[43] In Allahabad, the Chamars of the cantonment had declared themselves to be a 'self-contained' community, having broken away from high-caste Hindus, and celebrated their festivals separately in 1926.[44] Similarly, in Lucknow, in April 1927, various Chamar panchayats held a joint meeting, where they pledged their support for the Adi Hindu movement and resolved to form a volunteer corps.[45]

The informal nature of links between apex Adi Hindu organizations in the towns and local caste groups in neighbourhoods contributed to the strength and breadth of the movement. The Adi Hindu ideology attracted the mass of the untouchables and was espoused by them, for it provided a historical explanation for the poverty and deprivation of the untouchables, and presented a vision of their past power and rights, and hopes of regaining such lost rights. The Adi Hindu leaders were in fact providing an ideology to a receptive audience, which was already seeking means to claim opportunities and privileges in urban society.

The Adi Hindu Ideology: A Statement of Rights

The message of Adi Hinduism was primarily twofold. First, it attempted to dissociate low-caste status from menial occupations. Adi Hinduism challenged the imposition upon untouchables, based on their ritual status, of specific 'low' social roles, functions and occupations. In this respect, Adi Hinduism was a direct response to the constraints that untouchables encountered in urban society in achieving economic and social advancement. Its emphasis was less on caste oppression or exploitation, which might have been the chief concern if the movement had emerged in rural areas, and more on ritual exclusion, which was directly relevant to the urban untouchables. To challenge the exclusion of untouchables, the Adi Hindu leaders not only argued for caste equality, but also highlighted a view that the untouchables had been deprived of their original rights through force and political machinations by the higher castes, and that their rights should be restored. Arising from this, the second focus of Adi Hinduism was the notion that the untouchables were the past rulers of India. Through this generalized assertion, Adi Hindu leaders attempted to fortify the claims of the untouchables to rights and opportunities, such as for education or better jobs, to which the urban untouchables were seeking access.

A questioning of caste-based distribution of labour was at the heart of the Adi Hindu ideology; medieval bhakti was based on the idea of direct and personal communion with God, through devotion, meditation, and spiritual introspection. Adi Hindu ideologues emphatically highlighted the introspective dimension of bhakti and

gave this religious concept a new social significance. Spiritual introspection *(atma-anubhav)* was accorded supreme importance as the only way to arrive at true knowledge or *sadgyan* and to evolve one's own world view. Introspection, it was held, would lead to self-realization or self-knowledge (*atmagyan*) and would enable one to discern the difference between truth and falsity, which in turn would reveal the irrelevance and falsity of one's 'low' role in society. Acchutanand, at a session of religious catechism with an audience of untouchables, in reply to the question, 'what is *atma-anubhav?',* said: 'Real knowledge is the knowledge gained through introspection and which you have understood and realised on your own. For this reason, you will have to discern between good and evil, virtue and vice, auspicious and inauspicious, through your own introspection. This ['introspection'] is the path of self-realization of the *sants* [saints and preachers]. Self-realization is the only touchstone against which you can test truth and falsity, high and low.'[46] The concept of introspective self-realization *(atmavad)* was thus propounded not simply as a way of worshipping as in medieval bhakti, but more importantly to stimulate 'thinking- for-oneself' without reference to received notions and religious prescriptions from higher castes. The Adi Hindu leaders preached that through the exercise of introspection, it could be concluded that the distinction between 'high' and 'low' was neither preordained and natural nor grounded in 'truth', but socially determined, and that there was no inevitability about the 'low' functions that the untouchables were expected to perform in society as the servants of higher castes. They argued that the untouchables had been forced by the higher castes to perform certain jobs and services that involved the handling of 'impure', organic matter, and then, using the plea of ritual impurity, the high castes had accorded them 'low', servile status. Ram Charan said in a speech in 1927, 'They [untouchables] were made to do the most insulting and demeaning jobs, such as cleaning excreta and dirty clothes. They were repeatedly told that you are Sudras and your only work is to serve *[gulami].* Those who were thus made to serve *[gulam* or *dasa*] were then called untouchables.'[47]

The Adi Hindu leaders, therefore, repudiated the idea that untouchables should perform only 'low' and 'impure' occupations, on the argument that these functions had been imposed on them. The renewed emphasis on bhakti *atmavad* in Adi Hinduism was, thus, integrally related to a rethinking about the relation between caste and labour. It is noteworthy, however, that the criticism of the caste system by the Adi Hindu leaders was rather limited and had a narrow focus on the lack of rights or opportunities for the untouchables. The leaders did not jettison the notions of 'low' or 'impure', but concentrated on proving that such stigma and disabilities should not be attached to them due to their caste status. Nor did they attempt to question the concept that work was inherited. Instead they claimed that 'low' work was not the true inheritance of the untouchables. It was largely to buttress this claim that they asserted their pre-Aryan ancestry as the original rulers of India, for it enabled them to argue that they should re-inherit the ancient rights of which they had been deprived.

Rejection of the links between ritual status and a 'low' role in society thus went hand-in-hand with a historical explanation of the genesis of untouchability, to show how 'low' functions came to be imposed on the untouchables. The Adi Hindu theory about the origin of untouchability began with an assertion of a glorious past of the so-called Adi Hindu ancestors of the untouchables in pre- Aryan times, and unfolded as an account of the process of Aryan subjugation of the original inhabitants and the decline of the latter to the rank of untouchables.[48] The claim of a separate racial origin of the untouchables was substantiated by arguing that bhakti was a pre-vedic religion. Even though bhakti had its roots in Hinduism, the Adi Hindu leaders denied such associations. Bhakti was claimed to be a distinct and egalitarian religious tradition that pre-dated vedic Hinduism. The fact that untouchables practised bhakti was held to be the proof that they had descended from the ancient inhabitants of India.[49] The Aryans were accused of subsequently imposing the caste-based and ceremony-oriented vedic Hindu religion on the Adi Hindus.

The Adi Hindu leaders claimed that there had been ancient Adi Hindu kingdoms, capital cities, forts, and a thriving civilization. They alleged that when the Aryans invaded the country, they conquered these Adi Hindus variously by brute force, repression, and treachery. Being righteous, good, and free from deceit, the Adi Hindus were no match for the cunning Aryans, even though they were heroic and brave. Having defeated and subjugated the Adi Hindus, the Aryans forced them to perform 'low' jobs. They then devised the caste system and oppressive social laws, embodied in the Vedas and codified in the *Manu Smrti,* in order to relegate the Adi Hindus to untouchable status and to deprive them of their rights in society. Hinduism, with its caste system, was argued to be a political creation of the Aryans, who called themselves the higher castes. Ram Charan declared at a meeting in 1927: 'The rule of making Sudras was not a religious rule. It was naked politics.'[50] It was further held that the Aryans themselves assumed higher status as Brahmans, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas in order to make education, political or military power, and wealth, respectively, their own exclusive preserves. The forcible and illegitimate imposition of low ritual status through ancient acts of conquest, expropriation, and dispossession was thus diagnosed to be the sources of the unequal division of labour in society. The caste system was deplored as the original and continuing cause of deprivation of the untouchables, on the argument that low status condemned them in perpetuity to menial occupations and consequently divested them of their rights and access to education, wealth, and power.

The Adi Hindu leaders projected the past not only as a period when the forebears of the untouchables were the rulers, but also as a golden age of social equality. In the Vedas and other Hindu religious texts, there are accounts of warfare between Hindu gods and *asuras* or *rakshasas* (demons), in which the latter appear as evil and oppressive, and vanquished by the gods. The Adi Hindu leaders interpreted these stories as references to the process of the conquest of the pre-Aryans by the Aryans. They claimed that the demons represented the Adi Hindu rulers, but they denied the authenticity of the depiction of the demons as evil and malevolent. On the contrary, they argued, the Adi Hindu

rulers were benevolent, peaceful, and egalitarian, their subjects lived in perfect harmony and happiness, and there was no aggrandisement of one group over another. The Adi Hindu leaders held that the Aryans deliberately vilified the pre-Aryan rulers as demons, in order to justify their conquest of the original races, and in fact that it was the Aryans who were belligerent and who unleashed violence and introduced inequality in Indian society.[51] The Adi Hindu leaders thus emphasized an essentially oppressive image of the Aryans. They then proceeded to condemn the higher castes of the twentieth century as upholders of the tradition of injustice of their Aryan progenitors, for not acknowledging the rights of the untouchables and for continuing to exclude and deprive them.

Through their newly-constructed history of original inhabitants of India , the Adi Hindu leaders outlined an idealised vision of social equality, and of the past power and glory that the untouchables had lost and were to reclaim.[52] By arguing that the caste system was a political instrument of the Aryans to deprive the untouchables, they declared that the untouchables should not remain condemned to menial occupations, illiteracy, poverty, and powerlessness. They put forward an explanation for the experience of their being deprived, menial servants in society, and projected a remedy to overcome the situation by denying the legitimacy of the caste system, presenting it as an alien imposition, rather than by claiming higher status within it. At the same time, their theory about the origin of the caste system as a form of social domination and their notion of a past golden age of social equality suggested a challenge to the hierarchical conception of society, the potential implications of which went beyond their immediate practical concern of repudiating the connections between low-caste status and menial work.

The Adi Hindu leaders also highlighted a self-image of the untouchables as good, honest, and truthful, simple folk who had been conquered and deprived. This self-identity was, however, not simply one of good and helpless victims. By asserting that the untouchables were the true masters of the land, the Adi Hindu preachers cultivated a

sense of entitlement to rights and power, at the same time as they heightened an awareness of deprivation. Moreover, the leaders echoed and reinforced the notion of a separate religious identity of the untouchables, which had already begun to be expressed through bhakti. They portrayed bhakti as the distinctive religious heritage of the untouchables, and posited the egalitarianism of bhakti against the inequities of vedic Hinduism. It has been seen above that the Adi Hindu movement spread beyond the ranks of the literate leadership. This was because it provided a political vocabulary for the untouchables to claim rights and opportunities in urban society. The leaders drew upon the familiar religious idiom of bhakti and animated it with visions of a new order of equality and rights.

Labour and Social Reforms

The spread of the ideology of Adi Hinduism was reflected in social reforms among untouchable groups in the towns. The central focus was on denying the religious rituals and ceremonies prescribed by the higher castes for the untouchables, and, in particular, on defying the 'low' social duties and labour imposed on them. Medieval bhakti devotionalism had rejected idolatry in vedic Hinduism and the trappings of ceremonial worship that shrouded God behind a veil of rituals. The Adi Hindu leaders now denounced Hindu ceremonies for the further reason that these were designed by the higher castes as tools to deprive the untouchables. They argued that the higher castes stipulated elaborate and expensive modes of observance of religious festivals for the lower castes in order to impoverish them, to ensure that they would remain in a constant state of economic dependence or debt bondage to the higher castes, and thereby to force them to continue to perform menial labour. The Adi Hindu leaders preached the need for reform of social and religious practices as a means of achieving economic self-sufficiency and occupational diversification, as well as to redirect savings to gain education and better living conditions.[53]

These ideas found application in social and religious reforms spearheaded by various untouchable caste panchayats from the 1920s,

which laid down the rules, customs, and rites to be observed by caste members. Many panchayats denied that pilgrimages, the holding of expensive religious feasts, and the elaborate observance of religious ceremonies were meritorious acts, and these were actively discouraged. Some panchayats also decided to streamline the ceremonies observed on the occasions of birth, marriage, and death. These included *chhatai* (sixth) and *barahi* (twelfth), which were rites performed on the sixth and twelfth days after birth and death respectively. There were also attempts to dispense with lavish meals on these occasions, as such practices were seen to be mere emulation of the higher castes, leading to indebtedness and impoverishment.[54]

While social reform attempts were partly aimed at promoting thrift for economic improvement and gaining education, they were also envisaged as means to undermine the control that the higher castes exercised over the untouchables. The emphasis on social resistance against the higher castes, and especially against the imposition of 'low' functions on untouchables, was revealed in changing practices among urban sweepers and scavengers from the mid-1920s. The Ravidas Chamar panchayats of Kanpur and Lucknow, in this period, resolved not to handle dead animals, as a mark of their refusal to perform a 'low' function that had been forced on them.[55] Actions like these were not simply superficial attempts to gain social respectability in the eyes of higher castes, as is evident from similar instances elsewhere.

The annual report of the Benares Municipal Board in 1924–5 stated that the number of Chamars performing 'customary' sweeping and scavenging in households had declined dramatically, while there was a corresponding increase in the number of sweepers employed by the municipality.[56] This may partly have been due to differences in the rates of remuneration for private and municipal sweepers, even though the municipal report did not suggest this possibility. Instead, the Municipal Board report in the following year attributed the lack of customary sweepers to 'the infusion of a spirit of superiority in them'.[57] This suggests that the sweepers were unwilling to perform scavenging functions when these were expected from them as 'customary' services

in private households, but were agreeable to being employed by the municipality, for in the latter case conservancy occupations could be seen as essential public utility services, rather than simply 'low' occupations imposed on them. This clearly encompassed an effort to undermine the link between ritual status and 'low' role or duties in society, rather than being an act of 'sanskritization' to emulate the higher castes.[58]

A similar attempt found expression among the sweepers (Mehtars) of Kanpur in a different way. The Kanpur Mehtar panchayat decided to defy an established custom, whereby the untouchables, due to their low status, were considered to be entitled only to leftover and rejected food and goods of higher castes, called *utran* (discarded, used or second-hand clothes), *jhutan* (leftover or half-eaten food), and *phatkan* (refuse or extra bits, literally chaff separated from grain after winnowing). Under the initiative of their panchayat, sweepers in Kanpur refrained from eating *jhutan,* food thrown out from higher- caste households after their meals, which the sweepers used to collect and consume during cleaning and sweeping.[59]

Defying the restrictions and functions imposed on the untouchables by the caste system was clearly a driving force behind their social reforms. This dimension was also revealed in a somewhat paradoxical way in the failure of a reform attempt by Adi Hindu leaders. In their efforts at labelling caste distinctions, Adi Hindu leaders in the towns sought to eradicate ritual barriers on social intercourse among various untouchable caste groups themselves, such as between Chamars and Mehtars, by urging commensality. They tried to organize inter-dining ceremonies called *kuccha* (raw) meals, where members of various untouchable castes brought raw vegetables, which were cooked at the same place for shared meals. However, *kuccha* meals met with very little enthusiasm.[60]

This indicates that the focus of social reforms among the mass of the urban untouchables was not on overcoming ritual barriers on social interaction, in spite of their being urged to do so by their leaders. They were not seeking to undermine caste divisions in so far as these merely

defined a set of practices to regulate social interaction. Their attack on the caste system was directed specifically at its function as a vehicle of exclusion from rights or opportunities and for the imposition of 'low' roles on the untouchables, which in turn was seen to be the cause of their continuing deprivation. It was for this reason that religious resurgence and social reforms among the mass of the urban untouchables also, at times, developed into support for caste-based political agitations, spearheaded by literate leaders, to gain recognition of their rights and privileged access to education and employment. Securing the government's endorsement of their rights was seen by the untouchables as a significant precondition to undermining the perpetuation of their social or occupational disabilities in the urban milieu, and their confinement to menial or 'low' labour.

Conclusion

The Adi Hindu movement and bhakti resurgence suggests how migration and urbanization influenced, in significant ways, the pivotal concern and ideological focus of untouchable caste movements in the early twentieth century. Untouchable social movements overtly took the form of religious revivalism and social reforms, and were influenced by contemporary cultural and ideological developments. A closer analysis, however, indicates that a central theme dealt with the distribution of work and duties in society as conceived by the caste system, and that this emphasis was directly triggered by the changing nature of relations between caste status and labour in the towns. Urbanization had a liberating influence on the caste-subordination of untouchables in occupational relations. Yet, at the same time, the benefits of so-called 'modernization' for the untouchables were limited, and caste distinctions were not eradicated in the crucial area of employment opportunities. The distribution of work in the towns continued to coincide with caste status, and the mass of the untouchables remained confined to the lowest rung of the labour market.

Caste status thus assumed a specific, though altered, significance for untouchables in the urban context. They viewed ritual standing as a significant determinant of occupational exclusion and deprivation, in

spite of a slackening of caste domination. Not surprisingly, the untouchables strove for caste equality through religious revivalism, and mounted a challenge against the constraints on occupational diversification and the determination of labour and work based on caste status. For this purpose, the untouchable ideologues harnessed and elaborated the available theories about the ancient racial origin of low castes, in an attempt to reclaim what they projected to be their proper inheritance of rights and opportunities in society. Their overwhelming concern with breaking the links between low status and labour, however, served to limit the extent of their radicalism. For they concentrated on a theory that could enable them to by pass the caste system and its division of labour by referring to a pre-vedic past; but they did not attempts to address the basic principles underlying the caste system about purity and pollution or about the inheritance of social duties. The Adi Hindu leaders thus did not pose a direct threat to the caste system, even though their conception of it as an instrument for imposing social inequalities implied a critique of ritual hierarchy. The Adi Hindu movement was, in essence, conceived as and remained a protest against the attribution of 'low' roles and functions to the untouchables by means of a claim not to be Aryan Hindus; it was not developed into a full-blown, direct attack on the caste system.

6

Looking for Brides and Grooms*

ROCHONA MAJUMDAR

> 'You too will marry a boy I choose', said Mrs. Rupa Mehra firmly to her younger daughter.
>
> Lata avoided the maternal imperative by looking around the great lamp-lit garden of Prem Nivas . . . 'Hmm', she said. This annoyed her mother further.[1]

Arranging suitable matches for various characters in the cast constitutes a central theme of Vikram Seth's 1349-page novel *A Suitable Boy*. Mrs Rupa Mehra decided that in order to qualify as 'suitable' for her daughter Lata, the prospective bridegroom would have to be 'a good, decent, cultured, *khatri* boy', and she spent the bulk of her time utilizing the train passes inherited from her dead husband in travelling from place to place in search of just such a boy. For Amit, the Calcutta-born young poet, son of Mr Justice Chatterji, 'an arranged marriage with a sober girl'—divined his father's elderly clerk Biswas Babu—was the solution to all problems thrown up by life. These resolutions, seemingly incongruous with the temperaments of the characters, the rebellious Lata or the quirky Amit, are humorous because they are bizarre. Yet, they offer an astute insight into a central preoccupation of most Indian parents and guardians, namely, to seek

out a suitable match for their wards based on a set of socially determined criteria.

The flourishing existence of arranged marriages among Indians is for many proof of the firm hold of 'tradition' on present-day Indian social life. The negotiation of such marriages via matrimonial advertisements is treated simply as a modern transmutation of an age-old custom.[2] The dichotomy between the 'modernity' of the advertisements and the so-called 'traditional' character of arranged matches does descriptive and analytical injustice to the phenomenon of negotiating arranged marriages, giving the institution the appearance of a holdover from the past. The practice of brokering marriages assumed a specific character during the colonial period and found its place among other institutions of colonial civil society and was tailored to suit the needs of people in a modernizing, urban, social milieu.[3]

In this chapter, I explore the colonial history of the institutional machinery—comprising *ghataks* (traditional matchmakers), matrimonial advertisements, and marriage bureaus—at work behind the institution of arranged marriage in the city of Calcutta. This and the next chapter will delineate the 'marriage market' as it evolved in Bengal in the late colonial period. My aim here is twofold. The first is to investigate the history of the rise of marriage advertisements and the predominance of this form of seeking brides and bridegrooms over the traditional matchmaker. The second is to analyse the contents of these advertisements and their contemporary critiques in order to elucidate a contradiction at the heart of the patriarchy that consolidated itself in Bengali Hindu families in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This contradiction, best captured in contemporary discussions of dowry and ideals of womanhood, centred around the fact that the same patriarchal cultural politics that valorized domestic virtues in women actually contributed in reducing their economic worth. This in the end proved injurious to the interests of both men and women. Women were cast in roles that confined them to the domestic space and portrayed them as unsuitable for any positions of responsibility in public life. Men, in their turn, suffered as fathers and

guardians of daughters, for they now had to face the burden of having to 'offer' dowry in order to arrange marriages for their daughters. The debates around matrimonial advertisements draw our attention to this contradiction. My analysis covers the period 1870 to 1940, years in which Calcutta grew into a teeming urban metropolis with a thriving popular press, schools and colleges and an expanding and diverse population.[4] Matrimonial advertisements, which from the early years of the twentieth century assumed more importance than individual *ghataks* in the process of arranged marriages, did not represent an aberrant mutation of a traditional practice. Rather, mapping the rise of this advertisement culture and the corresponding decline of the traditional matchmaker in wedding negotiations will demonstrate the ways in which notions of a new Hindu patriarchy—one based on a novel understanding of caste and an aestheticized image of the bride—came to mark the lives of a new middle class that developed in Calcutta. By focusing on the process of marriage negotiation and the shifts within that process, I foreground the impact of capitalism and related social forces—such as the rise of the modern city, a marketplace culture, and the burgeoning of a new print culture—upon the institution of arranged marriage. Viewed thus, Seth's fictional Mrs Rupa Mehra ceases to be a tyrannical busybody, meddling with her daughter's future. She epitomizes a much more realistic portrait of a certain figure of Indian modernity, one among hundreds of Indian parents trying to gather as much information as they can about prospective bridegrooms in order to determine a suitable match for their ward.

The research presented here mines a hitherto unused archive of matrimonial advertisements that started appearing regularly from around 1909 in caste-association journals like *Kayastha Patrika, Kayastha Samaja, Jogi Sammelani, Prajapati,* and *Ghatak* and then constituted a regular feature of newspapers such as *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Bengal Times* and *Ananda Bazar Patrika*. Interestingly, even though some of these journals were the mouthpieces of particular castes —*Prajapati* called itself a Sadgop caste journal—they published matrimonial advertisements from other castes as well, namely Brahmans, Kayasthas and Baidyas, the three high-status castes in

Bengal. I also use articles, letters, autobiographical accounts, and essays on marriage negotiation that appeared in both periodical literature and books during this period.

Urban Culture and the Decline of *Ghataks*

Marriage advertisements appeared in newspapers and periodicals in large numbers and on a regular basis from the early years of the twentieth century. Even though there were instances of a few stray advertisements soliciting brides and bridegrooms before this period, the task of negotiating marriages belonged to the traditional matchmaker, the *ghatak* or *ghataki* as he/she was referred to in Bengali. We need to explore contemporary opinions on traditional marriage negotiators, for it was the critique of these individual intermediaries that set the stage for more impersonal matrimonial columns, and by the 1920s to the rise of marriage bureaus.

The urban historian S.N. Mukherjee has demonstrated that the early merchants and bankers who moved into Calcutta during the 1760s and 1770s, and were the first group of Indians to settle in the city established family deities, patronized Brahmins and *ghataks,* and entertained Europeans as a Mughal courtier would do.[5] *Ghataks* had an important place in the social organization of Bengal and early Calcutta. The late-nineteenth-century accounts of their decline were rendered meaningful precisely because of the role they played in caste organization and marriage until the first half of the nineteenth century. In his account of factional politics in Calcutta, S.N. Mukherjee describes how Nubkissen (Nabakrishna Deb), an important landlord of old Calcutta from the mid-eighteenth century, patronized *ghataks.* It was with the aid of *ghataks,* argues Mukherjee, that Deb raised his social status by marrying his grandson Radhakanta Deb into a high caste *kulin* Kayastha family. Mukherjee noted that *ghataks* exercised an 'unusual hold' over high-caste Bengali society for centuries. Their main function was selection of appropriate matches. To this end they kept registers 'of marriages, of important social events and decided the social status of the *kulas* (families).'[6] In addition to brokering marriages *ghataks*

functioned as genealogists who determined caste ranks and catalogued the position of people within the caste hierarchy. Their vast knowledge of family histories allowed them to adjudicate in disputes over the social rank of families within particular castes. Nabakrishna Deb, for instance, was able to establish his influence over the Kayastha caste through the mediation of *ghataks.* As an important patron to many *ghataks,* Nabakrishna got the *Kayastha Kulagrantha* (a digest of family genealogies) systematically recorded and exerted considerable authority within the Kayastha caste. His efforts were crowned when he was declared *goshthipati* (chief) of his caste in Bengal. In light of such evidence Mukherjee argues that in early nineteenth-century Calcutta *ghataks* generally 'had considerable power over society.'[7]

In his *Tribes and Castes of Bengal* H.H. Risley also mentioned the respectability *ghataks* enjoyed in Bengali society. He marvelled at their remarkable memory while observing that some *ghataks* could offhand 'repeat the names of all members of the main as well as collateral branches of any family in his particular part of the country; of the families with which they have married, and of the issue of such marriages.'[8] He wrote that rich families claiming higher status would often offer bribes to *ghataks,* which the latter usually refused. 'Disputes', wrote Risley,

> are common, and the *ghataks* who favour a claim that is fallacious, and who attend at an unauthorized marriage, fall in the estimation of those who have questioned its soundness and declined to be present. The scruples of a single *pradhan ghatak* [principal *ghatak*] often mar the otherwise perfect satisfaction of a parent on the marriage of his son to a family of higher rank than his own; and should all the leaders unite in forbidding the marriage, it is impossible to win any permanent promotion beyond that laid down in their registers.[9]

It appears from these accounts that *ghataks* functioned as repositories of upper-caste social memory in Bengali society. Before newspapers and caste newsletters became widespread, *ghataks* performed the task of social registers.[10] Why and how then, one wonders, did the profession

of *ghataks* slide into one of utter disrepute? In tracing the steady deterioration in historical perceptions of the *ghatak* into a petty and unreliable mercenary we hear doubts voiced about this profession as early as the mid-nineteenth century, doubts that were soon transformed within the space of a few decades into a firm condemnation of this group of professionals. Risley's praises may be contrasted to other early-nineteenth-century commentators, who raised questions about the *ghataks*' righteousness.

George Johnson remarked in a travelogue published in 1843 that *ghataks* were 'men of a fawning and flattering disposition' who in the 'assemblies of the Hindoos' would 'often panegyrize some individual as much for his giving them a few rupees, as they would satirize him for not listening to their adulation. They sometimes involve parties in difficulties by getting up matches of a disreputable character; yet, nuisances as they are, their services cannot be dispensed with so long as the present system of Hindoo marriage continues, which does not admit of an interview between the bride and bridegroom before the wedding night.'[11]

The scepticism voiced by Johnson gained general social consensus by the late nineteenth and certainly the early years of the twentieth century. An essay entitled 'Kayastha Ghatak' (1919) that appeared in the periodical *Kayastha Samaja* observed that famous *ghataks* of the past Edu Misra, Harinath Acharya Chudamani, Dvija Vacaspati and others were remembered with great respect in Kayastha society precisely because as *ghataks* they were much more than simple matchmakers. In fact, the essay claimed that these *ghataks* never negotiated marriages.[12] Instead, they were men who devoted themselves to the sole task of maintaining genealogies, and did not earn their livelihood as marriage brokers. It was as genealogists and not marriage contractors that *ghataks* earned the title of *kulacharya* (arbiter of a lineage) and commanded social respect in particular *samajas* (caste councils). The author narrated tales of some legendary *ghataks* like Nandaram Mitra, a famous Ayurvedic practitioner who abandoned his occupation as a healer in order to be a genealogist, and to that end became a student of

one Kamalakanta Vidyavagisa. It must be noted here that the names of Nandaram or Edu Misra recur in much of the caste literature published in late-nineteenth-century Bengal such as Lalmohan Vidyanidhi's *Sambandhyanirnaya* or Nagendranath Basu's monumental *Bangera Jatiya Itihasa* (The National History of Bengal). The details of these works are often contradictory and any resolution on them about the precise historical situation of these individuals awaits further research.[13] Nandaram went on to become a great genealogist of the Dakshin Rarhiya Kayasthas,[14] a task that had hitherto been performed by his teacher, a Brahmin. From this account it appears that being a *ghatak* involved mastery of ancient manuscripts, a privilege reserved for Brahmins until Nandaram's advent in the seventeenth century.[15] Nandaram's erudition earned him the title of 'Sarbabhaumya', or a sovereign among his distinguished *ghatak* successors like Anandiram, Govinda Chandra, Dinanath Mitra. Once some Dakshin Rarhiya Kayasthas distinguished themselves as genealogists, *kulin* Brahmins ceased performing that task in Kayastha society. The writer of this essay, one Hridayanath Basu-Varma, identified himself as an heir in this remarkable line of scholars and lamented the absence of this knowledge among current practitioners of the trade.

A similar image of the ideal *ghatak* was supported in Nagendranath Basu's *Visvakosa,* the Bengali encyclopaedia put together between 1886 and 1911. According to Basu, a *ghatak* should be able to determine and have detailed knowledge of *kula* (lineage) and its various branches. Simply knowing the names of families or persons did not qualify a person to be a *ghatak*.[16]

The fact that *ghataks* had ceased being genealogists and were simply concerned with negotiating matches was attributed to a structural transformation in the occupation of *ghatakali* (the trade of *ghataks*, a word considered synonymous with matchmaking by the end of the nineteenth century). 'Bibahera Ghatakali' (Matchmaking in Marriage),[17] an article published in 1886, in the journal *Prachar,* pointed to the decline in the nature of the profession during this period indicated by the rise of female negotiators or *ghatakis*. The rise of the

latter, it argued, was due to the increased say that women in Calcutta were claiming in the decision-making processes of the family. 'Spending, clothing, social etiquette, socializing are all in their hands', the author commented. As a result, 'in marriage negotiations too they are the chief arbiters. Male *ghataks* do not enter the inner quarters of households, hence they no longer get matchmaking deals and have had to abandon that business. They have been replaced by female *ghatakis*.'[18] In other words, the rise of the female *ghatak,* in the eyes of the author, was symptomatic of another 'unwelcome' feature—women's modernization and consequent professionalization.

The writer criticized this development by arguing that in a country where child marriages were prevalent the function of *ghataks* was of utmost importance, a task that female negotiators failed to carry out well. A good marriage depended on the availability of detailed information of family histories, genealogies that recorded, for instance, the vices (*dosas*) that had crept into a family over generations. This realization, he wrote, had caused our ancestors to devise the *kulinpratha,* a system of intra-caste ranking based on the possession of certain attributes. The code of *kaulinya (kulin* status) was dependent upon the constant performance of certain activities and not something that could be taken for granted by virtue of birth alone. Most important among these activities were proper marriage and reproduction. Families could lose or improve their status through marriage. It was in this connection of finding and negotiating the right match that *ghataks* played an important social role. Traditionally, the writer maintained, the task of finding the right match involved possession of detailed knowledge that came from recording and maintaining *kula-panjikas* (family genealogies). This is what, according to him, made the *ghataks* the supreme arbiters of matrimonial relations in Bengali-Hindu society.[19] The occupation of matchmaking by *ghataks* was comparable to that of horse breeders in Europe whose specialized knowledge has led to the striking improvement of livestock in England and France, an improvement not matched by human beings in these places.[20] He wrote: 'If you go to breeders in these countries, they can trace the

lineage of a particular horse. We need professionals who can supply the same information about human beings. Male *ghataks* given the particulars could supply such information. But now female *ghataks* can only speak about jewellery, they are unable to speak on more important matters. The womenfolk are not even aware what the important matters are, hence they don't even ask for these questions to be investigated.'[21]

Ghataks according to this article were both professional genealogists responsible for maintaining elaborate family histories as well as negotiators. However, the entry of females into the profession had led to a marginalization of the genealogist and favoured simply the more material and contractual aspect of the trade. It is unclear whether the historical relation posited by the author between the decline in the genealogical aspect of *ghatakali* and the rise of female negotiators is true. It is clear from a number of contemporary accounts, however, that there was a definite rise in the number of female *ghataks* or *ghatakis*. George Johnson noted:

> Of late it is worthy of notice, native women have also embraced this profession, and, as might be expected, are more fortunate, if not more honoured, than their male rivals, or brethren, in trade. They easily get into the females' apartments, a privilege which the men can never enjoy. Those who know anything of Hindoo society must be aware, that the opinion of a Purdah woman, relative to a marriage, operates strongly with other members of the family; and the admission of the female *ghataks* to the presence of the ladies, gives a facility to obtain their acquiescence.[22]

The Bengali writer Mahendranath Dutta, in his *Kalikatar Purano Katha O Kahini* (Tales of Old Calcutta), concurred with Johnson's views: 'From my childhood *ghatakis* started replacing *ghataks* because the women of the household hold greater sway in matters related to matchmaking.'[23] Meredith Borthwick has also noted that, around 1868, the *ghataks* had 'been superseded by the female members of the craft and have almost passed away from the cities and large towns and by 1885 most marriages in Calcutta were arranged by *ghatakis*.'[24] From the

diverse body of evidence cited above, we could argue that the rise of female negotiators highlighted the reduced role of the genealogical expertise of male *ghataks* in the marriage process. Conservative male commentators, as we have seen, criticized this development as symptomatic of a general social decline in the occupation of *ghatak*. Their critiques centred on the fact that modern marriages did not entail as much exchange or collection of information about families as they did before. Thus the task of *ghatakali,* the function of matchmaking, simply became one of brokering matches between families without entailing any great knowledge of genealogical details on the part of matchmakers.

Yet another sign of the erosion of the traditional prestige of *ghataks,* the fact that they were often perceived as predatory mercenaries, abounds in the rich autobiographical literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Bengali writer Sudaksina Sen, who was later married into a Brahmo family, noted in her autobiography that her father lived in the constant fear of *ghataks* who hounded her grandfather to get him (her father) married a second time. The Sens were *kulins* and had *shastric* (scriptural) sanction to marry innumerable times. This and the fact that their family was relatively well to do made their house a target for *ghataks.*[25] Similar references to *ghataks* are found in Rashbehari Mukhopadhyaya's *Sankhiptya Jibanabrittanta* (A Brief Account of My Life) where he recalls how he would always escape whenever *ghataks* visited his grandfather.[26] Contemporary sociological texts carried the same message. For example Shib Chunder Bose in his *The Hindoos As They Are* (1881) also exhibited a modern sensibility that was critical of *ghataks:* 'When an unmarried boy attains his seventeenth or eighteenth year, numbers of professional men called *Ghatucks* or match-makers come to the parents with overtures of marriage. The men are destitute of principle, they know how to pander to the frailties of human nature; most of them being gross flatterers, endeavor to impose on the parents in the most barefaced manner.'[27]

Early works on prostitution in India also refer to the menace of *ghataks.* These petty professionals deceived young girls into the trade

through 'marriage frauds'. Citing detailed accounts of a contemporary case one author writes: 'The professional matchmakers are not always honest people and make false statements for the sake of commission. The guardians of marriageable girls are sometimes duped and induced to give in marriage their daughters along with handsome dowry to persons of false identity. Recently there was a case of this nature in Calcutta. In this tragic drama two young men named Panchu and Haricharan played the parts of bridegrooms, while Binodini Ghatki played the part of a professional matchmaker.'[28]

Shorn of practical utility, genealogies maintained by the traditional *ghataks* increasingly became 'historical sources' for early nationalist historians of Bengal. A case in point is Nagendranath Basu's multivolume *Bangera Jatiya Itihasa* (The National History of Bengal), mentioned above, which was based on such sources. There were, however, still a few cases where *ghataks* maintained their manuscript collections and guarded them zealously. In his reminiscences Nagendranath Basu described his encounter with one such *ghatak,* Rajanikanta, a resident of the Ichapura region of Bikrampur in present-day Bangladesh. Rajanikanta had in his possession the family genealogies of many Brahmin families of Bengal. But he refused to part with them when he learnt that Basu—a Kayastha—intended to write a history of Brahmin social practices.

Basu's was a historian's veneration of the social knowledge possessed by *ghataks.* More commonly, however, the trade of *ghatakali* was associated in the popular imagination in the late nineteenth century with relentless mercenary instincts and ruthless promotion of social evils such as polygamy, child marriage, the abduction of young girls from villages, and negotiating marriages of 'fallen' women under false pretences. *Ghataks* became emblematic of the dangers and risks that an urban householder faced in the modern conditions of a big city. Their supposed indiscretions became a subject of debate among those members of the Bengali middle class who worked for social reform. *Ghataks'* much touted venal instincts and duplicity militated against the middle class's new and romantic conception of marriage as a spiritual

union of two people. It was against this background of widespread mistrust about *ghataks* that matrimonials came into prominence in Bengali society.

The Rise of Matrimonial Advertisements

The matrimonial section in *Prajapati,* a Sadgop caste journal, started in 1909 was entitled *'ghatak',* as if the journal had taken over the function of intermediaries who negotiated marriages to earn their livelihood. It would be instructive for our purposes to quote at length from the text of the opening sections of *'ghatak'* which was published at regular intervals for almost two years after the journal was started in 1909. All these wedding journals addressed a 'fear' that plagued the parents of prospective brides and bridegrooms—the fear of unreliable information. The opening sections of *'ghatak'* thus addressed precisely this fear: 'Finding *ghataks* when needed to negotiate marriage relations for sons and daughters is no longer possible. In many cases well-meaning, innocent householders are harassed for placing their trust upon mercenary and crafty *ghataks.* Consequently, many people travel far and wide seeking brides–bridegrooms based upon word of mouth communicated via relatives and friends. Under such circumstances, as those who have experienced this process are aware, it is an arduous task securing information about prospective marriage candidates.'[29] From guaranteeing confidentiality to investigating claims made by families, there were a number of steps the journal was prepared to take to assure readers of the accuracy of the information it provided.

> So that subscribers of *Prajapati* are able to remain at home and easily obtain information about marriageable candidates a monthly list will herewith be published in *Prajapati*. In addition to what is published, our registered records contain detailed accounts and particulars of numerous other prospectives. If the guardians of interested brides and bridegrooms wrote in a self-addressed postcard or sent a letter with a half-*anna* stamp we respond.
>
> The bride or bridegroom's family will either meet or correspond through letters to negotiate matters hereafter. We simply supply them

with the address and other particulars; but if anybody wishes to settle matters via the services of a *ghatak* from our office, and communicates that to us we could make arrangements. In sum we spare no effort in the selection of bride or bridegroom.[30]

Following this introductory pitch, the journal sounded some warnings and stated certain rules to families entering into marriage negotiations. They assured their subscribers of complete confidentiality and reliability in their reports and investigations of marriageable persons and their respective families. Caution was urged and hasty decisions in matters of matrimony were warned against. 'Matchmaking is a task of immense responsibility. Please do not execute this duty in haste via the services of a traditional matchmaker (*ghatak*).'[31] The editors proclaimed integrity and honesty of conduct, saying that if they heard anything unsavoury about the prospective bridegroom's habits and family background, his name was immediately struck off from their register. For example, this was how the periodical once described an unworthy groom: 'Though the prospective bridegroom has married before, he says himself that his character is spotless. Negotiations with the aforementioned man were going on when the girl's father from Rangoon requested us to inquire his into whereabouts confidentially. Our investigations revealed that the man was associated with some prostitute and his character was extremely impure.'[32] Or, in another instance it was reported that, 'A man showed great haste in his desire to be married. Secret inquiries revealed that he was asthmatic, his father and elder brother had died of this illness. His life-chances were also slim.'[33]

Another periodical, *Ghatak,* started in 1927, announced an elaborate set of rules for an association of matchmakers, Ghatak Sangha (Ghatak Association) that it had set up. The association was responsible for negotiating matches on the journal's behalf. Reliable service was offered to members who could file their details in the journal's register for a fee of Rs 4. A reduced rate of Rs 2 was levied upon the parents/guardians of bridegrooms agreeable to marrying girls without demanding dowry. The journal offered the services of its own matchmakers from this unit

for a charge of Rs 5, to be paid only after the families had been notified about the results of the search. In cases where dowry transactions took place the Sangha demanded payment of five per cent of the total amount as service charge. The Sangha would bear all costs of dispatching letters, telegrams, and employing intermediaries *(ghataks*). Also, the particulars of the bride and bridegroom would be advertised once, free of charge in the Sangha's mouthpiece, *Ghatak*. Complete confidentiality was guaranteed to all customers. The Sangha also committed itself to financially supporting indigent bridal families and assured parents a respite from the machinations of fraudulent *ghataks*. The periodical therefore trod a fine line between commerce and social reform.[34]

Prajapati, Ghatak, Jogi Sammelani, and *Anusandhan,* all launched between 1890 and 1927, were journals that articulated the blight afflicting the trade of marriage negotiations. While the first three periodicals often commented on the phenomenon of decline in the profession of traditional *ghataks, Anusandhan* (Investigation) carried stories of conniving *ghataks* who brought great harm upon innumerable families. *Anusandhan* edited by Durgadas Lahiri was committed to exposing frauds and dishonesties rife in society at large. The city was portrayed as a site of widespread moral decline. Most stories in *Anusandhan* were supposedly based on real events. *Ghataks* and their numerous alleged swindles were sketched in great detail in the pages of this periodical from the latter half of the nineteenth century. In addition to these four journals most periodicals dealing with social issues were critical of the role played by *ghataks* in the marriage process. The theme of exploitation by *ghataks* recurred in many literary accounts of the period.[35] While there was no question about the importance of negotiations, it is clear from the literature that match-making as carried out by individual *ghataks* was publicized as extremely unreliable. Many journals played upon a perceived popular mistrust of *ghataks* as they introduced their matrimonial columns to readers and urged people to subscribe to their registers for a fee.

Most periodicals carrying matrimonial columns maintained registers and an army of negotiators who worked for them. In fact many of them sought qualified *ghataks* for their services as revealed in an advertisement that appeared in the journal *Ghatak* in 1927: 'For "*Ghatak Sangh*"—Able *ghataks* required. Applicants must write to the address below with individual reference letters. Stamps worth rupee one must be supplied for written response. Secretary, *Ghatak Sangha Karyalaya (Ghatak Sangha* Office), No. 18 Pitambar Bhattacharya Lane, Post Box no. 10815 Calcutta.'[36]

Clearly then, the marginalization of *ghataks* who operated as free agents must be seen as a change in the character of the business of matchmaking. The free agents were replaced by larger formal institutions that negotiated the marriage market through the printed word. Matrimonials read by numerous 'consumers' created a sense of an open market in marriage negotiations. Their stated goal was to shun the devious tactics associated with *ghataks* and they justified their work as creating an open and free world of marriage negotiations. As Calcutta grew in size and the social composition of the city became more mobile and diverse, matrimonial advertisements and marriage bureaus that served the function of matchmaking as well as various other types of marriage-related services such as matching horoscopes, seemed better suited to the needs of the urban householder. In fact, many matrimonial bureaus combined the task of brokering marriages with astrological functions. Advertisements like the following littered contemporary newspapers and journals: 'Undertake marriage negotiations of respectable families—Jyotirbid Pundit K. Samajpati B.A. (Medical Astrologer)—Residence, 4 Guruprasad Chaudhury Lane, Calcutta.'[37]

The advertisement quoted below appeared in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* on 26 March 1926. It highlights the growing influence of astrology in the marriage market. An apparently satisfied client of an astrologer's services exclaims in the advertisement,

> Marriage Expedited! Having had a daughter of marriageable age I have been passing sleepless nights through anxieties for sometime. I could not settle her marriage in any place. Being disappointed I went

> to Mir Hamid sometime in June last year and requested him to do something for me. He gave me some 'Tawzies' for use, which I did. He further gave me definite assurance that my daughter will be married within the month of July, 1925. I am glad to say that his Tawzies worked like miracles. The marriage ceremony of my daughter took place within a month, i.e. July . . . Lalit Mohan Ganguly, Raja Rajballav Street.[38]

Mir Hamid proclaimed himself as a 'spiritualist, psychist and occultist'. His address was provided at the bottom of the advertisement. Advertisements like these prompt an interesting speculation about whether the horoscope or reliance upon astrology was a concomitant of the fact that families based in Calcutta now married into one another with much less information than would have been available before. It is possible that in the absence of detailed genealogical information, knowledge that at least the stars were favourable to a prospective match comforted anxious parents. The urban astrologer in Calcutta owed his existence, in part at least, to this condition.

Significantly, however, most of the journals carrying matrimonials identified their columns or their matchmaking units by the traditional nomenclature of the profession, *ghatak*—a recognition of the importance of the profession while reconstituting its scope and operational style to make it amenable to modern conditions of living. The predominance of advertisements and the institutionalized, bureaucratized structure of matchmaking for weddings were clearly established by the 1920s. The text of the advertisements pointed to the standardization of this practice by this period. A random selection of advertisements from *Amritabazar Patrika* illustrates these developments.

> 'MARRIAGE GAZETTE'—great boon to *Kannyadayagrastha* parents [parents with the charge of marriageable daughters]—Sample copy one and half annas—Secretary, Shrimati Tripti Lata Devi Bharati, Post Box 10863. Calcutta.[39]

> Marriages in Agrahayan (Bengali month corresponding to November- December), I.C.S's, M.B's, B.E's, Dy.Magtes, Munsiffs available. Wire or write Manager Projapati 200 Cornwallis Street, Calcutta.[40]

Marriage bureaus were firmly ensconced by the 1920s, and by the 1940s matrimonials appeared alongside other 'classifieds' like 'Situations vacant' or 'Tenders'. The font of these advertisements was much smaller, and their text was completely standardized into a format that continues even today.

The Success of the Matrimonial Culture

Having observed the increased visibility of matrimonials over the traditional matchmaker, the most important question that faces the historian has quite naturally to do with the factors that bolstered the success of this new culture. How was it that these pithy capsules containing some extremely condensed description of prospective brides and bridegrooms satisfied most people? The following insertion that appeared in the journal *Kayastha Patrika* in 1910 is helpful in providing us with certain necessary insights into this question: 'Dt. Burdwan, P.O. Daihat Bhaskarpara, Sri Radhagovinda Debbarma's (Estate Manager to the *Zamindar)* second daughter, age 11. Very beautiful, willing to marry his daughter into any *sreni* [grades within sub-caste], the man must be well educated and have a sacred thread. Marriage will be conducted in the manner of *Ksatriyas.*'[41] One phrase in this advertisement—'willing to marry his daughter into any *sreni*'—clues us into the changes in the social context that prepared the ground for matrimonial advertisements. It draws attention to people's attitude to the observance of caste rules. The phrase implied a willingness among parents to marry their ward to a candidate across subdivisions within the caste. It was in this changed attitude toward the observance of caste rules that we could begin to situate the decline of the traditional matchmaker and the success of the matrimonial advertisement culture.

Historians like Sekhar Bandyopadhyay and Lucy Carroll have shown that the meaning and implications of caste had undergone certain marked changes by the second half of the nineteenth century. The cultural contents of each caste, they have argued, had become more or less similar, at least so far as ritual ceremonies or social customs were concerned. As Bandyopadhyay points out, 'emotional attachment to caste persisted; for caste now became the focus of the mobilization for the pursuit of group or individual interests, as the disability of many of the lower castes was now mainly due to economic or educational backwardness.'[42] Bandyopadhyay's statement signals that while the internal subdivisions within each caste became a matter of relative indifference, affiliation to a caste group was an important mark of identity in contemporary Bengali society. The changing attitude to caste lay at the heart of the new civil society that came into being in Bengal from the turn of the twentieth century. The numerous caste associations that were formed around this time promoted what M.N. Srinivas has called a 'horizontal stretch' of caste groups at the expense, as it were, of their vertical organization. What this meant was that people from all social sections, irrespective of their caste, exhibited or shared in the aspiration to a certain set of civil social rules. Matrimonial advertisements embodied the status aspirations of the new caste society, and herein lay the key to their success over the traditional matchmaker.

Caste consciousness exhibited both by the so-called higher and the lower castes constituted a major component of twentieth-century social reform.[43] But by no means was this consciousness a call for a return to the *dharmasastras* or for a strict observance of caste rules in terms of the internal differentiation within caste groups. Rather, this consciousness manifested itself as an assertion of caste identity in the forms of modern civil society. These changes also clarify the reason why consciousness about the details of *kula, vamsa* (lineage) was now relegated to the private realms of autobiography rather than appearing in public life.[44]

That this brand of caste consciousness would be conspicuous in the wedding process is not surprising. One index of this was the large

number of publications by the Rajbansis, Mahisyas, Sadgops,[45] castes that were traditionally placed lower than the Brahmins and Kayasthas in the hierarchical ordering of Hindu society, with numerous essays on their origin tales and the manner in which weddings and other rituals should be conducted in their particular *samajas* (communities). For the higher castes like the Kayasthas, caste consciousness manifested itself in the desire to claim Kshatriya status and wear the sacred thread like Brahmins and in encouraging marriages among various sub-groups within the caste. Intermarriage among the different sub-groups of a caste—*antarganik bibaha*—was promoted as a cure to numerous problems in the system of marriage alliances such as dowry. For instance in a chapter entitled 'Panera Pratikara' (A Cure for Dowry), in the book *Sachitra Panapratha* (The Illustrated Dowry System), the author argued, 'It is extremely difficult to find a match who belongs to the same caste rank and subdivision . . . In many instances, even when an eligible bridegroom who does not ask for too much dowry is available, the bride's guardian is forced to reject him as he does not belong to the same sub-caste. While determining an eligible bridegroom for your daughter, pay no attention to his specific caste genealogy. Concentrate instead on his family background, character, education and financial standing.'[46] So, education, family background, and financial status emerged as the main criteria for judging a prospective bridegroom. The candidate's caste was also taken into account, but only as one factor among many rather than as the most important one. Statements, promoting intra-caste marriages, such as the above, testified to the strength of the movement for marriage among the various subdivisions of a caste, *antarganik bibaha.* The movement was especially keen among the Kayasthas as evidenced from the numerous reports published in the caste's journals, *Kayastha Samaja* and *Kayastha Patrika.*[47] It was argued in these reports that intermarriage among the different subdivisions of the caste were in keeping with scriptural rules and would free the Kayastha marriages of numerous ills, such as dowry.

All these changes suggest that while the internal subdivisions within each caste became a matter of relative indifference, affiliation to a caste group was an important mark of identity in contemporary society. The decline of the traditional matchmaker can be directly linked to this change in the meaning and significance of caste. The genealogical aspect of marriage negotiations, a task which the traditional *ghatak* was trained over generations to perform, was rendered superfluous as the significance of caste in colonial society was altered. In the social arena of the colonial city the particulars of one's caste subdivision was not of much importance. Rather, it was more important to be broadly identified as a Brahman, Kayastha, Nabashak or Mahishya in order to make the most of reserved seats in government institutions, scholarships, and other advantages in the colonial public sphere.

The altered importance of caste in the urban public sphere was reflected in the place it was accorded in marriage negotiations. Caste now became one criterion among many that had to be matched in order to determine the suitability of a match. Thus a 1909 questionnaire circulated by the journal *Prajapati* to its clients contained a list of fourteen questions to the families of the bride and bridegroom where only one pertained to caste. The rest of the questions had to do with the amount of land and property owned by the family, how much money they were willing to spend at the wedding, what gifts/ dowry they were planning to give the bride/bridegroom respectively, the educational status of the groom, the professional background of the bride's father or guardian, and so on.[48] It should also be clear by now as to why people became sceptical of the information supplied by individual *ghataks* about the particulars of brides and bridegrooms. Since specialized knowledge about caste rank and lineage was no longer prized as much as before and had become one item of information among many, the economical management of information by marriage bureaus and advertisements appeared to be much more credible than the word of mouth of individual *ghataks.* The task of identifying candidates by their basic caste background was performed efficiently by advertisements in caste association journals. Not only that, they also brought to their 'consumers' various marriage-related products such as horoscopes,

gazettes, almanacs. The advertisement culture was much more reflexive to the new demands of public life in the city.

The homogenization of caste was indicative of the emergence of a new kind of urban identity—the *bhadralok* (gentle people), a conglomerate of various castes identifiable by a set of shared values. Matrimonials were totems of the status aspirations of this group—aspirations best expressed in the stock descriptions of men and women found in the body of the advertisements.

Marriage Advertisements: An Embodiment of Social Domination

Matrimonial advertisements consisting, typically, of a few lines describing with short coded expressions such as 'educated' or 'skilled in domestic work'—the qualities deemed as desirable in prospective brides and grooms—thus bespoke a reality in which caste divisions had come to be subsumed in a larger social formation, namely, the middle class that is also known as the *bhadralok* of Calcutta. The marriage advertisements show that much more than rankings internal to a caste or those between castes, it was participation in public life and civil society ('educated', 'employed') that now marked the status of a marriageable man. For a woman eligibility was determined in terms of a certain ideal of domesticity that included proficiency in household tasks, a modicum of education, and a high premium on good looks. Note, for instance, the following advertisement that appeared in the marriage periodical *Ghatak* in 1927:

> Wanted educated, Kayastha bridegroom for a Kayastha girl—*mukhya kulin* [head of intra-caste superiors], *dakshin rarhi (AknaSamaja),* twenty-eighth *parjaya* [generation], age 14 years, very good health, well-built, good manners, medium-complexioned,[49] conversant in Bengali and English, proficient in music and singing, knows all kinds of up-to-date crafts, very clever and nimble. Photo will be sent if necessary. Father a high-level government employee, monthly income Rs 800, highly connected. Original residence Konnagar, Hoogly,

currently lives in Delhi. Able to give Rs 3000 as dowry *(pana)*—if the bridegroom is to his liking then he is willing to increase the dowry *(joutuk)*. No objection to a Moulika groom. Must be Dakshin Rarhiya Kayastha.[50]

Or, an even earlier one from the periodical *Kayastha Patrika:* 'Bride's father: Shri Ramnath Dutta, Father's qualifications: *Dakshin Rarhi Kayastha,* Lawyer in Howrah; Girl: Age 13, medium complexion, beautiful face, good figure, first grade student in Mahakali Pathshala, obtained silver medal in home science examination.'[51]

Following the Age of Consent Act of 1891 the age for the consummation of marriage was fixed at 12. The progressive image of most journals was therefore linked to their carrying advertisements only for girls of and above that age. Emphasis on the educational qualifications of the girl was also notable, reflecting the status aspirations of the new middle class. On the one hand, wives had to be adept in the tasks of modern homemaking, which required primary education, skills in the kitchen, embroidery, interior décor, and so on. On the other hand, she also had to be a good caste Hindu who would fit into the image of a *grihalakshmi* fashioned as the epitome of tradition. *Kayastha Patrika, Prajapati, Ghatak, Jogi Sammelani* all carried numerous articles against dowry transactions in weddings. From 1910, *Kayastha Patrika* in particular started a section reporting weddings that took place with or without dowry transactions.[52] In an article entitled 'Natun Bibaha Paddhati' (New Marriage Procedure) in April 1910, the journal reported that many weddings were conducted according to the following set of rules: 'The match was decided after the bride and bridegroom were seen by the families; the bride's family was dissuaded from giving *barpan* (dowry) or ornaments to the bride. In case the man was insistent the match would be cancelled. The bridegroom's family would gift ornaments to the bride according to their financial ability. The various ceremonies around the wedding would be held without ostentation.'[53] Some matrimonial advertisements reflected these reformist concerns.

Simultaneously, these advertisements, like many others of the same ilk, showed that people were both conscious of their own internal caste ranking *(mukhya kulin* or from the main *kulin* family), as well as emphasized their declining importance ('no objection to a Moulika', i.e. person of a lower rank). Of importance was the bridegroom's education, as well as the assertion that the girl had all the necessary attributes of femininity, namely, she was in good health, had good manners, was proficient in singing, 'home science', and other 'up-to- date crafts'. This new ideal of womanhood was tied, as several scholars have pointed out, to a refashioned Hinduism that was urban, based in print-culture, and the history of nineteenth-century social reform.[54] This idealized Hinduism de-emphasized the importance of rituals in caste divisions, and actually promoted a new model and aesthetics of womanhood, identifying women with the new, urban, middle-class Hindu home. The very identification of men with public life (education/employment) and women with home and hearth ('skilled in domestic work') tells us that, howsoever this new Hinduism may have replaced rituals by aesthetic ideals, it stood for a new imagination of patriarchy, and in that sense for a new logic of social domination (men over women) made possible by the emergence of a colonial public sphere.

As recently suggested by Dipesh Chakrabarty in his discussion of Bengali civil society, the emphasis on family *(kula)* and a specific kind of education for girls conducive to the maintenance of the family, alerts us that these discussions of caste and gender were ultimately about the ideals of modern Bengali patriarchy.[55] Caste categories were harnessed to explicate patriarchal ideals geared towards the maintenance of the extended family. As pointed out by Chakrabarty, late-nineteenth-century discussions of the *grihalakshmi* or *kulalakshmi* were predicated on the secularized image of the goddess Lakshmi, signifying familial prosperity and clan well-being. Thus the desired qualities in a prospective bride or *kulastree* would be calm, composed movements, quiet, downcast eyes, and a sedate demeanour. This image was counterpoised to that of a *kulata,* a woman lost to her *kula* or family, a fallen woman or prostitute. The latter was 'restless, garrulous', with a

roving eye seeking male company, bawdy of dress, and filled with lust.[56] The evocation of caste and gender in the matrimonials has to be situated against these nineteenth-century discussions.

Even as they embodied a new Hindu patriarchy, matrimonials also point to deep contradiction at the heart of this development. The valorization of participation in public life in the case of men and of domestication in the case of middle-class women was accompanied by the rise of dowry, sums of money that a marriageable girl's father had to pay to the boy's family, indicative surely of a decline in the economic value of women however much their cultural value soared. This in the end became a problem for the new patriarchy itself, for what a man gained as a groom in the marriage market he lost in trying to arrange a match for his daughter. Indeed, Bengali literature of this period is full of sympathy for fathers who face economic ruin in having to cough up huge sums of money as dowry to the families from which came their sons-in-law.

The practice of demanding dowry was reflected in the text of innumerable matrimonial advertisements. I quote below a representative sample from the periodical *Prajapati:*

Barendra bride:

Kap,[57] Kashyap, Dark complexion, twice married acceptable, will spend Rupees 1000.

Kap, Kashyap, only daughter, beautiful, *devgan, bipravarna, karkat rashi,* for a good bridegroom willing to spend Rupees 3000 . . .[58]

Sadgop bride:

Niyogi, very beautiful, student of Bethune school, daughter of a *zamindar* (landowner).

Ghosh, Lakhapati's (millionaire) daughter, bridegroom will be the only heir. Bridegroom must have passed Entrance exams or a business-man.[59]

Bridegrooms wanted:

Kulin Kayastha bridegroom wanted. We know of a beautiful girl, if the candidate is suitable willing to spend upto Rupees 20,000.

Bride wanted: Mitra, Passed Entrance, salary Rupees 30, demands Rupees 1000. 24 Parganas.[60]

This section ended with a note from the managers of the periodical that they had such a huge number of Moulika brides listed in their register that it was impossible to publish them all in detail. Depending on the eligibility of the bridegroom the various families were willing to spend between Rs 500 and Rs 20,000, and interested guardians could write to the journal for inquiries.[61] The matrimonial sections in the other periodicals mentioned earlier such as *Jogi Sammelani* or *Ghatak* presented an identical picture.

At the turn of the century, as the *bhadralok* were grappling with a new employment structure, the rising advertisement culture bolstered a new patriarchal structure by affirming that the rightful donors of dowry were the bridal family. The trend manifested itself in the increasing numbers of advertisements from lending agencies and insurance companies that gave loans for 'daughter's marriage money',[62] and in some instances in advertisements for domestic sons-in-law for it made more sense to maintain a man with an income than part with family resources by way of dowry.

Dowries for Daughters—Payable at 18, 21 or 25 years of age.

Endowments for Sons—Payable at 18, 21 or 25 years of age.

Educational amenities for children—Payable for 3, 5 or 7 years from age 15

No medical examination required. For terms & c. apply to Chief Office at the New York Life Insurance Co., For the East, No. 8, Old Court House Street, Calcutta. Giving date of birth and date (*sic.*) the money is required. N.B. Life Insurance and Annuities issued on all approved plans at cost.[63]

> A philanthropic (parentless) *Dakshin Rarhi Kulin Kayastha* M.A, B.L. student groom wishes to become domestic son-in-law. He is earning Rs. 250 p.m. If anybody want [*sic*] such groom, please write to Secretary 'Marriage Gazette' Post Box 10863 Calcutta.[64]

The rising centrality of money in contemporary marriages, symbolized by the predominance of dowry eventually led to searing critiques of the matrimonial culture. I want to close this paper with a consideration of these critiques. These critiques, as we shall see, addressed mainly the monetary aspect of arranged marriage. They failed to look beyond the phenomenon of the marriage market to the kinds of gender roles and inequalities generated by that market. Their imagination of women remained as hierarchical as the ones promoted by the advertisements, one in which women were associated with beauty, orderliness, familial solidarity, and household prosperity.

Critiques of the Matrimonial Culture

The following insertion that appeared in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* on 19 March 1929 drew attention to the fact that most bridal families now perceived marriages as a huge burden. Utilizing the same print medium that played a crucial role in advertising prospective brides and bridegrooms, people now made appeals for financial help.

> 'A *Brahmin* in Distress: An Appeal' To the generous public: In these hard days it is hardly necessary for me to tell the generous public how difficult it is to bear the expenses of a girl's marriage, especially if her father or guardian happens to be a poor man. The plight of such a man can be better conceived than described. And furthermore, this plight reaches its extreme limit when the man has got several daughters to marry. I am a poor *Brahmin* employed in a printing press with a poor salary and am in a self-same difficulty. The marriage of one of my daughters is going to take place towards the middle of the month of *Agrahayan* (November) and I know not how to bear the incidental expenses . . . For my part, I depend solely on the grace of God and the generous help of those kind persons who are disposed to feel for me. I appeal to them with all the earnestness I

> can command to realize my distress . . . If they help me, they will be helping not myself personally but righteous and humanitarian cause. Let me hope that my appeal will touch the hearts of my sympathizers. All contributions will be acknowledged in the Press. Bijay Chandra Chakravarti, 23 Sitakanta Banerjee Lane, P.O. Baghbazar Calcutta.[65]

If this advertisement was a cry for help in a commercial social milieu there is also evidence to suggest that people sought to reject this commercial culture by participating in more informal networks of marriage negotiations. Negotiation machinery operative through networks of family and friends functioned as a constant critique of the commercial culture of professional marriage intermediaries and matrimonial advertisements. There are records of people, perhaps a minority, who negotiated weddings without a fee and were proud of undertaking such informal negotiations as a pastime.

Trailokyanath Bhattacharya, a schoolteacher who worked between 1900 and 1958, has left detailed reports of the weddings he arranged in his autobiography. In the section entitled 'Bibahe Ghatkali' (Arranging Marriages),[66] he wrote, Although I did not belong to the class of *ghataks,* there is no doubt that I was an expert in *ghatakali*.[67] My help and effort resulted in many weddings among my own family and friends and it was with great pleasure that I undertook to play a leading role in forging these auspicious bonds.'[68] None of these weddings involved any demands of dowry and the gifts given to the girls were left to his discretion as negotiator. Aside from expressing a critique of commerce, his records are significant for the manner in which he serialized the particulars of the various women and men he married off. For example: 'Jhansi (U.P.) resident (Jogendrakumar Chattopadhyaya's youngest son) Gopal (Hrisikesh) Chattopadhyaya's marriage to my niece Srimati Radharani. Gopal was an M.A. in a Jhansi school'; or, 'Resident of our former district Faridpur, village Ratandiya, Manikchandra Roy's sister's daughter Harani's wedding with Jogendranath Bhattacharya's younger brother Upendranath Bhattacharya. Upendra was a teacher and musician in Raja Suryakumar

Institute.'[69] Clearly, there are striking structural similarities between these and the way in which matrimonials stated the family backgrounds and occupations of prospective brides and bridegrooms. Also, the fact that the writer described his task as *ghatakali* minus monetary transactions, revealed the strong hold of the concept of negotiating matches in contemporary society. These correspondences highlight the impression that the critique of matrimonials were grounded primarily in the monetary aspect of marriage negotiations, something the advertisement and professional matchmaker culture was seen as promoting. The critique embodied in Trailokyanath's informal marriage negotiations had to do with the threat that money, and the new culture heralded by modern commerce, represented to the modern, educated elite, imagination of Bengali family and civil society in the late nineteenth and twentieth century.

By 1940, the critiques of matrimonial culture became more explicit and appeared in the same periodicals that had started the business of placing marriage advertisements. In an article entitled 'Biyer Bigyapan' (Marriage Advertisements), the writer Debendra Chandra Basu-Mullick criticized matrimonials for creating a 'marriage market' where men and women were treated as objects that could be bought and sold. 'Everything in this country is now evaluated in terms of pound-shilling-pence. Since price is the primary determinant of the utility and quality of all objects, then why would brides and bridegrooms be an exception to this rule in the marriage market? The bridegroom's price depends upon his annual income, university certificate, appearance and colour of skin; and the bride's on her father's income and physical appearance.'[70] The author noted that the market was flourishing as proven by the appearance of numerous 'shops' conducting the marriage business. Variously named 'Arya Vivaha Pratisthan', 'Bibaha-Sahayak Sabha', Bibaha-Karyalaya Sabha', '*Ghatak* Office', 'Prajapati Samiti', these were marriage bureaus that conducted a profitable trade in prospective suitors from around the 1920s. He noted that the advertisements often did not spell out the exact amount of dowry the grooms were expecting, for such transparency would reduce their bargaining power. Many matrimonials declared that the man was going abroad for higher

education and desired that his bride accompany him. Implicit in such matrimonials was an expectation of sponsorship for these ambitions from the bridal family. Most advertisements carried a box number rather than the bridegroom's address for that also would diminish his prospects.[71] Critiques such as Basu-Mullick's are redolent with a romantic rejection of the social objectification of human beings. The urban, commercial culture had rendered all human beings into commodities that could be traded for a certain sum of money. Basu-Mullick's critique of matrimonials pointed precisely to the threat that money represented to the humanist view of life promoted by Bengali intellectuals from the mid-nineteenth century onward.

Whereas for early social reformers like Vidyasagar the imperative of marriage (widow-remarriage in particular) was to ensure middle-class respectability by bringing together men and women within the legitimate social bond of matrimony,[72] the new commercial culture transformed respectability into a commodity that could be bought at a certain price. The expression *kannyadayagrastha* we saw in one of the insertions quoted earlier signified a father or family with the charge of a marriageable daughter. The position of such a family remained perilous until this charge was respectfully handed over to another family via marriage, for which the girl's natal family had to pay a price in the form of dowry. The demands for dowry in the matrimonials illustrated the route social morality had travelled. In the monetized setting of the city there was little room for altruism and performance of social responsibilities without a promise of monetary returns. There was also no space for the articulation of interiority and sentiments, for respectability could now be bought through the transaction of matrimony from advertisements that described a woman and man in certain stock phrases.

The mourning for a loss of interiority and individuality in the commercial culture becomes clearer as we read Basu-Mullick's scathing account of the descriptions of women in the matrimonials:

> The adjectives describing the would-be bride are poetic. For instance 'very beautiful', 'flawless beauty', 'pretty', 'exquisite', 'fair', 'milky complexion', 'real beauty', 'bright intermediate complexion', 'extremely adept in domestic skills', and so on. Even such a surfeit of adjectives fail to reduce the price of the prospective bridegrooms. Earlier the practice of *swayambhara*[73] prevailed in this country. That has changed now. Suitors now decide upon their life partners after thoroughly scanning through a string of girls' photographs. In most cases however their choice is decided by the amount of dowry and gifts offered by the bride's family . . . All men prefer a beautiful bride from a wealthy family of good social standing. That the main criterion is the amount of cash is not revealed at first. The bargaining ensues afterwards. If the girl in question is very beautiful or pretty the bridegroom's family might desire to bring their price down somewhat and the demand for dowry is reduced; but if the girl is dark or slightly fair the girl's guardians are thunderstruck . . . Most girls in Bengal are dark-skinned, so most marriages involve transactions of huge sums of money.[74]

He also noted the ridiculous qualifications that are sought in young girls. He quotes an instance when one of his relatives, a young girl who had completed high school and was quite pretty, was rejected as she did not have any musical talent or dancing skills. In other words, in their drive for social prestige people sought particular attributes in men and women. The relative number of attributes a candidate possessed determined their price. This process was biased against women due to their lack of earning potential compared to men. Hence, a greater premium was placed on female beauty, the absence of which would increase dowry demands. Commercial culture embodied in the matrimonials resulted in the 'thingification' of men and women, with little regard for their personalities or individual traits. The apogee of this transformation was in the demand for photographs, where decisions were made based upon a still shot of a person's outward appearance. Lamenting the course of developments, the author therefore wrote on a futuristic note that with the spread of matrimonial

culture, photographs of prospective candidates would eventually appear in newspaper columns and their images would be flashed on screen in cinema theatres.[75]

He was critical of lavish weddings whose harmful effects were evidenced in the shrinking number of charities in Calcutta. It also created a vicious cycle where rich families put all their 'gifts' on display —drawers, tables, chairs, safes, mirrors, paintings, electric lamps, fans'—to buy a name for themselves.[76] Their actions set standards that poorer families sought to emulate while bridegrooms and their families were left free to compound their pressure tactics to maximize returns. These performances were in complete contradiction to the aims espoused by various reformist organizations like the Kayastha Sabha, committed to abolishing 'the socially baneful dowry-system and extravagant spending in weddings.'[77] The author blamed women, the mothers and relatives of the prospective bridegroom for the escalation of dowry.

Monetary incursions within a social institution thus emerged as the central point of critique of the advertisement culture from the above writings. A link was established between the escalation of dowry and matrimonials, and this was perceived as a threat not simply to the ethical norms of marriage, but to society at large. The excessive preoccupation with profit reduced the number of charities in Calcutta, and prevented even wealthy families from observing ceremonies like *sradhs* (to propitiate the spirit of dead ancestors) or other religious festivals as elaborately as before.[78]

The anxiety expressed by writers like Basu-Mullick in their critique of matrimonials was much broader than it may have seemed at first sight. It had to do with the erosion of generosity, *bhadrata* (gentility) and spirituality from the middle-class social fabric, attributes that qualified the *bhadralok* in their own eyes, as the leaders of society. Basu-Mullick —a member of an important Kayastha family—had reservations against enumerating prices of marriage candidates according to their qualifications, reflecting the attitudes of a section of educated Bengalis

to the new commercial culture. To them this culture represented a violation of this imagination of a just society where money and commerce had a definite but restricted place in the sphere of work. Penetration of commercial ideals also contravened the fundamental principles of matrimony, which was supposed to forge eternal bonds between two families. I shall have more to say about the impact of these reformist sensibilities upon the formal aspects of Bengali weddings in later chapters.

The critique of money as a measure of all things, an idea deployed by writers as a critique of matrimonials, had historical roots in the writings of Bengali intellectuals in the late nineteenth century. For men like Bhudev Mukhopadhyay the critique of money was widened to a critique of European society, and was a characteristic he urged modernizing Bengalis to reject. As Tapan Raychaudhuri observes:

> An excessive preoccupation with money was to Bhudev one of the least acceptable features of western society and a major reason why Hindus must reject their ethical and social norms. The apotheosis of money made the Westerner hesitant to accept or give financial help even where close relatives were concerned . . . There was no rational reason, Bhudev pointed out, why financial help should be considered taboo. Unless one treated money as the measure of all things, other forms of help which were acceptable in the West were often of much greater value to the giver and recipient alike. The taboo was thus an indicator of the supreme importance attached to money. Another expression of this apotheosis was the virtual extinction of hospitality in Europe.[79]

Dowry, standing in for an invasion of money into the domestic as well as the civil-social realm by the matrimonials, thus emerged as the single most important subject of critique. This critique has to be understood in the context of the elaboration of the idea of civil society under conditions of capitalism in the colony. The overwhelming emphasis on money was a threat to the harmonious working of Bengali society. Huge spending in weddings diverted resources that would

otherwise have gone into religious festivals, charities, and other familial occasions—events whose celebration was intrinsic to *bhadralok* 'culture'.[80] The new commercial culture, it was argued, carried within it the potential to sow seeds of dissension in modern Bengal by urging young men to enrich themselves through weddings thereby encouraging a spirit of competition and self-interest.

Once we understand the critique of matrimonials in this light, the rationale behind the role assigned to women in these advertisements also becomes clearer. The matrimonials conveyed the impression that the only position given to women in these insertions was of someone who could be a successful housewife and hold together the extended family and thereby guarantee its prosperity. There was no room in these advertisements for a woman's self-expression, economic independence, or romantic interests. The portrait of an eligible Bengali bride in the advertisements evokes images of contemporary Victorian ladies. But the parallel ends there, and has a deep significance within the context that produced this image. The prospective bride must be capable of perpetuating the male lineage, *kula,* in the family she entered. To do this she had to be demure *(lajjabati),* sober, and skilled in domestic tasks for which no monetary returns were expected and help preserve the fraternal contract of the joint family. Such qualities were in perfect accord with the manner in which the institution of marriage was perceived in twentieth-century Bengal. Marriage, as we know, was always referred to in Hindu law as a sacrament, a lifelong bond between two persons and their families, and not a contract between two individuals that could be broken at will.[81] When women entered their new household they became part of a natural as opposed to contractual solidarity with its members. The qualities that would best enhance this process of assimilation are those advertised for would-be brides.[82]

Unable to envision alternative and empowering roles for Bengali women, the criticisms of matrimonials remained limited within the very nexus they set out to critique. For unless other, more different roles and options could be imagined for women, the valorization of educated, professional men and shy, beautiful girls would continue in the

matrimonials. The new commercial culture embodied in the matrimonials did not challenge the formal aspects of the aesthetic conceptualization of the home and women. However, by affirming the injection of money and commerce into the social organization of marriage it unsettled the very basis of this imagination of Bengali family and society. It produced gender inequality through practices such as dowry and encouraged trends that objectified men and women. In so doing it drew attention to the limits of the humanist, patriarchal imagination that conceptualized an idealized Bengali individuality within the extended family form.

7

The Sexual Politics of Caste Violence and the Ritual Archaic*

Anupama Rao

> The alleged incident with Sonabai which is denied by the defence took place some six months back. Yedu is said to have shown her money and held her *Padar* [the edge of the sari that wraps around the breasts] . . . One cannot say that the thing must have happened altogether.—**Judge C.J. Dighe, Judgment on Criminal Appeal no. 5/1965, 30 June 1965**

When I started fieldwork in 1996, almost everyone with whom I discussed caste violence mentioned Sirasgaon. 'Sirasgaon' was code for events that had occurred in a village of that name, the site of a spectacular 'atrocity' case of the early postcolonial period. As the unprompted recollections attest, the 1963 event was instilled in popular memory. In fact, I first came to know the details from a government servant I call S., who was extremely conscious of giving me information 'off the record'. Thus I keep the description of place vague, emphasizing *what* I heard as I recorded the story in my notes over two days. Taking this as a sample of women, his acute sensitivity to how ideas about gendered respectability were caste-

marked, and finally, his political sensibilities regarding the case as an instance of caste atrocity.

Day One

I went in today [Thursday, 16 May 1996] to ask for permission to follow up cases in district courts. I wrote up a visiting card, which the peon took in.

When I finally meet S., he is very sparkly and interested in academic work, and there are piles of registers on the floor. As is typical of administrative offices, his table is very large, and arranged in front of it are three rows of chairs. I briefly tell S. that I'm working on caste and law [my normal 'cover,' especially in government offices] and that I need permission to follow up on these cases. S. tells me that he will put my case before the chief justice, and that I should get the permission from the court in about three weeks.

I am getting ready to go, when S. says, 'If I may offer you some advice . . . I don't know if I should presume . . .' I say, 'Please, that would be very welcome.' S. says, 'You know there was a major case . . .' and before he can finish I ask, 'Sirasgaon?' I don't know why this case came to mind, but I am glad it did because now S. seems pleasantly surprised that I have heard about this case. I say, 'Can you tell me anything at all about the case? Everyone tells me that it was a big case, but nobody can give me any details because they were too young when the case took place!' [We both echo this last phrase together.] S. says, 'I was involved in the case, I was an advocate in Aurangabad at that time.' I am so excited I can hardly speak. I make an appointment to meet him the next afternoon.

Day Two

When I go in the next day, someone else is already there. S. introduces me to him, and then launches into his story. I am getting used to this style of 'interviewing' now. There are often other people in these big government offices, and the interview has

the feel of a performance in a durbar, where my informant holds forth, and I listen, pipe in with questions hoping to get a debate going with the onlookers if I am lucky, or else just look on along with the audience, nodding occasionally and taking notes. Of course I give up the idea of taping anything under these circumstances. At one point early on, S. says, 'You can listen, and write later.' I ignore him and put the notebook on my lap rather than keeping it in his view, and scribble furiously as he speaks.

There are the details of the incident, in condensed form. [Recounted by S.; S. does not remember dates, the case number, or other details.]

'Five women tried to fill water at the common well at about ten a.m. *Savarnas* [caste Hindus] tried to stop them, and Dalit men tried to resist. Twelve of the accused men went the next day and dragged the women out of their houses. The *sarpanch* [head of the village or governing body] and police *patil* were among the accused. They stripped the women and paraded them naked from street to street. Maybe 50–70 people were actually involved. The men were armed with sticks. RPI *karyakartha* [activist] and *taluka* [subdistrict]-level president Sakharam Khajekar went secretly to get the details. People were threatened before the police investigation began. Then our people came to Aurangabad to tell me [S.] about the case. I went to the SP [superintendent of police] and collector [Aurangabad]. The FIR [First Information Report] contains all details, but in the statements given to police, people said, 'We went to fill water, and they abused us [*shivya dilya*]'.

'Joshi was the public prosecutor on the state's behalf. There was a lot of publicity in the papers. The accused filed an application to transfer the case. My brother-in-law, who was also an advocate, and I supported this move. Almost all the accused were Marathas. The star witness was a *sutar* [carpenter]. Justice P.E. Vani tried the case in Aurangabad. The Dalit *mandali* [community] was worried about whether Joshi would try the case properly, and an application was

filed with the Government of Maharashtra to give the case to someone else.'

. . .

'Like others, I supported Laxmanrao Kulkarni's name, and suggested that the *vakil* [lawyer] should not be transferred just because of his caste identity [a demand that was made by other Dalit leaders at the time]. We appealed to Justice Dighe in the sessions courts when the case came to sessions. Initially the sentence was six months plus Rs 1000 fine. The Bombay High Court upheld the ruling of the Aurangabad District and Sessions Court. Then the accused went to the Supreme Court where the sentence was lessened. [I have not been able to find the Supreme Court judgment, if it exists.]

'Ramrao Adik appeared on behalf of the criminals. At one point during the course of the trial, I asked Adik how he could have appeared on behalf of the accused, and whether it was because they were Marathas. In turn, Adik asked if this was a 'Dalit' case. I answered that if this had been a case involving the stripping of Maratha women, I would have been against the men.'

S.'s story takes about an hour to narrate. Just as I am leaving, I ask about feminist intervention, and S. says there was none. Then he relates this anecdote: Soon after the Sirasgaon case, a report appeared in the *Maharashtra Times* regarding Swati Patankar, a woman travelling in a Bombay local train whose *mangalsutra* [necklace symbolizing a woman's status as wife] had been snatched.

S. mentioned that many activists and academics were incensed by this case and wrote to complain about the threat to the women's safety. S. says, '[I] wrote in to *Maharashtra Times* saying that a major case such as Sirasgaon had just occurred, and none of these academics had raised their voices. How was it that they were so angry about Swati Patankar. Was it because she was a Patankar [an upper-caste surname]?'

Lime many other atrocity cases, Sirasgaon was publicized by local-level activists through formal and informal networks. S.'s account of the case reflects the Dalit community's vigilance regarding caste violence and their ability to intervene—S. had been an advocate in Aurangabad, the local RPI had been involved, and so on. Matters of gendered respectability and sexual humiliation made Sirasgaon an issue of community honor. S.'s caste-marking sensibility and atrocity perception were framed largely around questions of political strategy— which political parties defendants were allied with, how sensitive they were to caste issues—and around the unspoken caste prejudice that attended cases of caste atrocity. These produced what Ann Stoler has called 'hierarchies of credibility', frames of legibility that dictate what can and cannot be said and by whom. This was a critical aspect of the framing of the Sirasgaon event as a legal case.[1]

Sirasgaon was part of popular memory, but it was difficult to get information about it. Once it was defined as a crime, the incident was transformed into a legal case available to researchers through multiple judicial iterations.[2] Even though I had heard the story from S. in May 1996, I only managed to track down case records near the end of my research stay, in June 1997. After a series of frustrated efforts, I finally found the judgments of the judicial magistrate first class and the sessions judge in the district and sessions court's storage room in Aurangabad city. I was allowed to take the case papers outside the courthouse to photocopy them the day before my departure. Once I had the case number and other details, finding the oral judgments of the Bombay High Court became easier.

The Sirasgaon incident was not merely a legal case, however. Ranajit Guha has argued that redefining events into crimes 'reduce[es] their range of signification.'[3] Legal redefinition is more than an act of epistemic containment, it is also a form of translation: quotidian practices are recontextualized and, in the process, rendered extraordinary. In this case, the extraordinary aspect—the prominent individuality of Sirasgaon, we might say—connected with and circulated through a larger force field whose operations we can refer to

as publicity.[4] The *Marathwada,* a newspaper published in the city of Aurangabad and run mainly by Socialists, played a significant role.[5] The Maharashtra Legislative Assembly (MLA) and the Maharashtra Legislative Council (MLC) discussed the Sirasgaon case, adding political ramifications.[6] The Republican Party of India held many rallies across Maharashtra to protest the event. People composed songs about Sirasgaon. The social circulation of information occurred at the intersection of diverse rhetorical registers—legal, journalistic, activist—of publicity around 'Sirasgaon'. These produced the multiple, refracted, and incomplete narrative that constituted Sirasgaon as a scandal.

Why focus on the texts of law? What important labour did court judgments perform? As we will see, it was through the individualizing mechanism of the court proceedings that Sirasgaon gained notoriety as scandal. Scandal straddles the terrain of secrecy and publicity, exposing routine events that most people would know, yet about which they profess ignorance. Individualizing what is often a systemic issue, the scandal—like the legal case—can make visible regnant structures of violence. According to S., the Sirasgaon incident originated in a quarrel over access to common water, one of the stereotypical 'causes' of daily-caste conflict. The sense that very little unusual had happened was initially promoted by the women victims themselves, who gave a first account describing only verbal abuse *(shivi dene),* and not sexual humiliation. Shame legitimized the public lie that 'nothing happened', but it also offered a path for male activists of the Dalit community to focus on caste violation rather than multiple enactments of sexual humiliation. The court records, however, traced a complex circuit of desire, transgression, and retribution played out between a Dalit family, the Sirsats, and a Maratha employer, Yedu Kale. In fact, it is not far-fetched to cast this scene of seduction and subjection as a ritualized performance of sexual humiliation, which can be reconstructed as a form of political violence, as *caste violence.*

The Court, the Family Drama, and Euphemism

This is the story of Sirasgaon as a legal narrative, as a story created by and for the law. On 22 December 1963, four Dalit women were dragged out of their homes, stripped, and paraded naked in the village of Sirasgaon, in Gangapur *taluka,* Aurangabad district. Six months earlier, one of the women, Sonabai Sirsat, had carried breakfast for her brother-in-law, Kishan, an agricultural labour. She encountered Yedu Kale, a Maratha landlord who employed Kishan. Taking advantage of the fact that Sonabai was alone, Yedu Kale propositioned her. 'Yedu is said to have shown her money and held her *Padar*.'

Sonabai told her mother-in-law, Laxmibai, about the incident. Both went to see Yedu's wife, Shevantibai, to complain to her about her husband's misbehaviour. She asked them not to make the matter public. Months later, Kishan decided to leave Yedu's employ. He visited Shevantibai at that time to remind her of the incident with Sonabai and asked Shevantibai 'to imagine what she would have felt if Kishan himself was to touch her sari or to outrage her modesty.'[7] By asking her to empathize with a woman who had neither caste status nor privilege, Kishan drew attention to Shevantibai's vulnerability *as a woman*. He was also asserting that he, like Yedu Kale, could make a woman aware of her sexual vulnerability. Dalit labourer or not, Kishan appeared to be saying that he was capable of harassing Shevantibai as a man.

Shevantibai clearly felt insulted and 'spoke about it to her husband with some relishments.' On 2 December Yedu Kale and a group of men went to Kishan's hut armed with sticks, demanding to see him. Kishan was away. When his father asked the reason for the men's visit, 'He was told that Kishan had played mischief with his [Yedu's] wife.'[8] Yedu began to beat Kishan's father, Vithal Amrita, as Kishan's brothers, Mohan and Lahanu, ran away. Kishan's mother, Laxmibai, was also beaten, and her sari was removed by Asaram Dada Agale. Two others, Tukaram Bhika Kale and Tukaram Dashrath Sirsat, removed Sonabai's sari. The two naked women were then dragged toward the village from their home in the so-called Baudhwada on its outskirts. About this time, another group of men, six or seven in number, rushed into Kishan's hut and dragged his sisters-in-law, Kadubai and Sakrabai,

outdoors, where they were also beaten and disrobed. The women were paraded to the *ves* (entrance to the village) while being beaten with sticks. On the way, they stopped at Yedu's house so that his wife, Shevantibai, could see them. The four women returned home later that day covered by a single sari that one of the perpetrators had thrown toward them.

Yedu's act of revenge mirrors his initial act. He had touched or pulled Sonabai's sari, and action countered by Kishan's conversation with Yedu's wife, Shevantibai. Disrobing the women and exhibiting them to Shevantibai suggested that Yedu was quite capable of protecting his wife and humiliating the Sirsat women. This is the kernel of the Sirasgaon event. The scandal at whose core is a public secret that reveals the underlying structure of caste sociality.[9] Rape, the stripping and parading of women, and other forms of gendered humiliation, reproduce upper-caste male privilege. Sexual violence is particularly indecipherable as *caste* violence because it is normalized as upper-caste privilege and experienced as an unspeakable form of intimate humiliation. Secrecy around sexual violence is doubly inflected. Perpetrators do not conceive it as violation except when they encounter resistance, in which case they brutally assert their rights. Its victims experience humiliation as gendered violence and as collective punishment of the family and community.

The Sirasgaon scandal illuminated structuring violence—its role in producing and reproducing stigmatized existence—as the (hidden) ontology of caste, which became evident through the individualized theatricality of caste crime. The proper name 'Sirasgaon' memorializes violence that was the result of deep structures of caste discrimination crystallized into a conflict between victims and perpetrators. Through the court case, seduction and subjection—or the ritualized performance of sexual humiliation—were also illuminated as a form of political violence, as *caste violence*. Thus the oddly reticent statement in the newspaper *Marathwada, 'Strasgavat ghadu naye te ghadala, Sarvanchi man sharamene khali zhukavi* [In Sirasgaon, something that should have never happened occurred. Everyone should hang their head in

shame'].[10] This statement can be read as shame at the public acts of stripping and humiliating the women, and as acknowledgement that sexual violence solidified upper-caste patriarchal power. The peculiar structure of the public secret was reflected in the judge's comments: first, that 'one cannot say that the thing must have happened altogether', and later, that '[the motive] has come forward in a distorted manner.'[11] The uncertain status of sexual violence as caste violence derived from the structures of caste patriarchy that justified it, and from its association with practices of secrecy and intimacy.

It is important that the Sirasgaon case was not registered under the Untouchability (Offences) Act and that its handling as a case shows only incipient awareness of the legal category of caste crime. Though cases involving anti-Dalit violence were categorized as caste crimes under the Untouchability (Offences) Act, public awareness of these laws was still underdeveloped. 'Caste atrocity' had yet to become a full legal entity. In addition, as is apparent from official records, collusion between local police, bureaucrats, and caste Hindu participants meant that ultimately, caste crime could be obscured by local indifference and legal proceduralism. Finally, laws to protect Dalit victims could impart a spurious legitimacy to treating stigmatized existence as the status quo, further compounding the difficulty of perceiving differential forms of burdened personhood.

Two actions, however, reveal Dalit political sensibility about the Sirasgaon incident: first, Kishan's challenge to Yedu's harassment of Sonabai, and then the Sirsats' immediate move to publicize the event beyond the confines of the village by calling in the police, the law, and RPI activists. When the women returned home, they sent a neighbour to the village of Malunja, about a mile away, to contact their relatives. One relative rushed to Sirasgaon, and then went to Gangapur, the *taluka* headquarters about six miles away, to consult members of the RPI before writing an application to inform the police subinspector [PSI] of the violence. The subinspector entered the incident in the station diary and then went to Sirasgaon with the relative and an RPI activist.

In Sirasgaon, the subinspector drew up a *panchnama* (record of the incident and victims' testimony witnessed by at least five people). He recorded all four women's comments together as one consolidated statement. The *panchnama* contained no mention of the women's injuries and, oddly enough, repeatedly noted, 'besides this nothing else happened'. The subinspector then told his constables to escort the four women and Kishan's father, Vithal Amrita, to the medical officer in Gangapur. But they were not taken to Gangapur that night; the subinspector sent a message calling their bullock cart back. A constable by name of Salunkhe later testified that a meeting of caste Hindu notables at the *gram panchayat,* or village council, office that evening had resolved to bribe Vithal Amrita so that he would not register the incident with the police.[12] Clearly the subinspector was aware of this meeting, since he called the cart back from its journey to Gangapur.

The cultural critic D.R. Nagaraj has described how Dalits' political awareness changes the political economy of village social life: 'The crucial fact is that the upper caste society does everything in its imagination and power to seek solution of the dispute within the confines of the village, but the Dalits are stubborn in their refusal to accept this and they seek the active intervention of not only the instruments of justice, but the involvement of the activists outside the village.'[13] The turn to state law is an act of delocalization that expands the domain of action and intervention, while simultaneously intensifying processes of localization through antiatrocity legislation and large-scale Dalit politicization. As I noted in the previous chapter, the split mimics the representation of the state as ideological unity *and* as a set of dispersed or divided bureaucratic powers, with implications for caste violence at two levels: violence understood both as local antagonism and as the structural entailment of Dalit politicization. After the Sirasgaon incident, the Sirsats used state law to circumvent village prejudice and community relations. That is, they drew the attention of the local RPI leader to the incident and sought access to law as a site of redress. Just as important, one of Vithal's sons, Mohan, suspected the subinspector's integrity and field another application about the stripping. Only then, two days after the incident, did the

subinspector investigate it as a cognizable offense that required a police inquiry and a medical examination of the injured women. Mohan's persistence, along with the support of RPI activists, led to the case being filed. The charges involved rioting, intent to hurt, house trespass, and outraging the modesty of a woman. By 26 December all ten accused were arrested.

The judgment of the *taluka* magistrate notes, 'The application which is registered by the PSI contains a paragraph showing that *the case of parading was not mentioned earlier because the ladies were bashful of disclosing the same*. However, it is the case of Mohan that this paragraph was added only at the insistence of PSI Patil.'[14] Mohan testified that PSI Patil had made him change his original application to include a paragraph stating that the women had been too ashamed to mention the stripping to the subinspector who first investigated the incident. Patil then used the alibi of female modesty to cover up his own procedural lapse.

In court testimony, the accused introduced the scenario that S. recalled: the women had been injured while bringing water through the village. They suggested that a scuffle had ensued when *savarnas* (caste Hindus) had protested against the Dalit women walking through the village after taking water from the main well.[15] Yedu Kale made contradictory statements. At one point he said that he had visited Kishan to inquire about his absence from work and to retrieve a two hundred rupee loan. At another point, he argued that he had been home entertaining a potential bride's family. Six of the accused said they were in their fields or working outside Sirasgaon. All maintained that they had been arrested based on false allegations made at the behest of Asaram Bhusare, with whom Yedu Kale had a long-lasting feud and who was described as being in league with the 'harijans.' Asaram Bhusare, the *upasarpanch* (deputy village head) of Sirasgaon, had a sister who had been deserted by Yedu Kale some fifteen years earlier. Personal animosity between Yedu and Asaram Bhusare was suggested as the reason behind the Sirasgaon charges. By this point, intimate ties

of kinship, marriage, and community were thoroughly saturated with local political signification.[16]

The magistrate of the *taluka* court rejected the alibi of factionalism and the argument that the Sirsat women were injured in a scuffle when they tried to bring water from the village. Although the case was not registered under the Untouchability (Offences) Act, the magistrate acknowledged the vulnerability of the 'poor harijans' while chastising the subinspector's judgment: 'PSI Patil had terribly erred in his duty when he tried to shelter the accused and minimise the offense as much as possible. The high principle of social equality for the poor harijans who were at the mercy of the other villagers was in my [the judge's] opinion trampled upon without any regard to modesty or humanity.' The judge desired to put down this 'animal instinct'.[17]

C.J. Dighe, appellate judge of the Aurangabad District and Sessions Court, affirmed the ruling. The accused were sentenced to forty-three months' imprisonment and a fine of Rs 300. Vithal Amrita was to get Rs 1000 in damages. Dighe accepted the fact that the social world of Sirasgaon was casteist and that it was perfectly possible that the women had been disciplined for a caste infraction. He argued, 'Actually the prosecution need not prove any motive. We have to look to the circumstances and other evidence for finding the guilt.'[18] Sympathetic to the Dalit women, Dighe spent a great deal of his judgment addressing the social conditions that made anti-Dalit violence possible:

> It is said that it looks very unnatural that no person came forward and no human being should be there to help the poor ladies. It is further said that the case about parading the ladies is unbelievable, inasmuch as, they are alleged to have been taken through the streets lined with a number of houses and it seems improbable that no inmate of the house not even a female one should come forward for their rescue. The argument is worth consideration. If the incident has happened, its tragic effect is heightened because no one has dared to come forward for helping the poor women. Instead of, therefore, coming to the conclusion that since no one came to their rescue, the whole story is concocted, it would be

> better to analyse the evidence on record . . . to find out why the bystanders could not have come ahead for succour. It is here that the complexion of communal tension or the communal aspect has to be rightly appreciated. However much one may say that Harijans are living in cordial atmosphere, the very suggestion given by the defence that they were subjected to attack because they used a prohibited road while carrying water pots goes to give an insight into the mind of the so-called Hindus of higher strata.[19]

Dighe was comfortable with a 'general', sociological explanation of caste crime. But how did he interpret the complex family drama that appears to have motivated the violence? Why were the women stripped and paraded? Dighe thought that explanation would prove difficult, but he did propose that when Kishan spoke to Shevantibai in a suggestive fashion, he 'lower[ed] the prestige and status of an influential agriculturalist [Yedu].' Dighe added that four of the accused were 'rich and influential' persons. He was sceptical, however, of the Dalits' claims about the origin of the incident:

> The social conditions of the Harijans could not be said to be as yet any way much better than what they were previously when they were called and believed untouchables. It is not unlikely, therefore, that Yedu should flurry up into a rage when a boy like Kishan had the audacity to enquire with Shevantibai in a straightforward manner making humilating suggestions as to what she would feel if he were to outrage her modesty. . . . The alleged incident with Sonabai which is denied by the defence took place some six months back. Yedu is said to have shown her money and held her *Padar* [the edge of the sari that wraps around the breasts and hangs down]. According to Sonabai and Laxmibai they complained to Shevantibai [Yedu's wife] who asked them not to make the matter public. *One cannot say that the thing must have happened altogether*.[20]

Dighe was unwilling to believe that Yedu might have harassed Sonabai, but he was quite comfortable interpreting the transaction between Kishan and Shevantibai as an insult to Yedu's prestige.

Imagining himself in the prominent agriculturalist's position of privilege allowed Dighe to interpret Kishan's actions as a challenge to Yedu's control over his wife and to his status as an upper-caste landlord. The sessions court judge may have professed some uncertainty about why the women were targeted for humiliation, but there was no doubt in his mind about tensions between Harijans and Hindus in Sirasgaon. He dissociated sexual violence from public practices of untouchability, however:

> Perhaps it is possible to interpret that both the sides are not making full breast of the previous incident if any. When one bears in mind that the ladies were more subjected to attack and humiliation, it is not unlikely that something connected with the females may have happened, and yet it has not come forward before the Court in so many words, I would be blamed for making a guess work but I am saying this only *to disprove the suggestion that the motive does not exist. Perhaps it has come forward in a distorted manner*[21]

The distortion was an effect of the use and abuse of legal categories. Because they did not fit standard descriptions of caste crime—denial of access to roads or common water taps—sexual violence and expressions of caste masculinity were illegible as caste crime.[22] Dighe applied the 'know it when I see it' model of untouchability practices. He saw clearly that the crime was committed in order to uphold caste stigma, affirming the common sense understanding of the Dalit as someone who suffers disabilities because she/he is already a Dalit. As the judge noted, 'It is here that the complexion of communal tension or the communal aspect has to be rightly appreciated.'[23] He assumed the prevalence of a caste habitus, and his judgment hinged on the idea of a caste mind at work. Yet the crime against the Sirsat family was not quite a caste crime, not 'in so many words'.

What are the consequences of such reasoning? Like progressive judges, protective laws seek to render Dalit bodies commensurable, that is, to equalize them by redressing their stigmatized status. These efforts at commensuration fail, however, because the Dalit is not only a political or juridical subject. The Dalit's encoded identity as injured

subject invokes elements outside politics, elements of the archaic—culture or religion—that cannot be legislated away. This creates an impasse in justice, which is also manifest at the level of the mundane and the procedural. Its effect is a denial of justice due to the inscrutability of sexual violence and humiliation *as caste crime*. Dighe's judgment reflects this impasse by shuttling between a sort of Gandhian moral outrage for protecting poor Harijans, on the one hand, and his focus on the technical and procedural missteps of the police, on the other. Thus, when we expect a judgment wholly based on procedural inconsistency, such as the errors of PSI Patil, Dighe suddenly poses the problem of how to do away with the social evil of untouchability or attempts to read motive by positing 'caste mind' at work in rural Marathwada.

In fact, PSI Patil's missteps did become the defining feature of the case. Though he was animated by a sense of social justice, Dighe focused his arguments on behalf of victims confronted with an *errant police machinery* that colluded with the accused to produce *procedural inconsistencies*. A half-spoken understanding of the conditions of possibility for the Sirasgaon incident was transformed into a language of procedure and evidence inflected by moral outrage. Dighe's judgment couldn't comprehend sexual violation as constituting caste violence. Describing the Sirasgaon incident as a tragedy, he addressed untouchability as a moral rather than a political problem. As he noted, 'If the incident has happened, *its tragic effect is heightened because no one has come forward for helping the poor women.*'[24] Condemning the immorality of stripping the women obviates a *political* reading of the relationships of caste privilege and patriarchy solidified through the humiliation of the women, an important matter to which we will return.

Does the invisibility of sexual violence matter when the courts produced a progressive judgment in favor of the Sirsats? From my perspective, it does, because the unique legal status of caste crime reveals a consequential bifurcation at the core of anti-atrocity legislation. Anti-Dalit violence was conceived of as socially motivated against a vulnerable collective, the result of a prejudice so deep that it

structured and normalized everyday social relations between Dalits and caste Hindus. Legislation against anti-Dalit violence challenged such social common sense. It was premised on the idea that law had the power to transform caste sociality because it could disarticulate the violence deeply embedded within social life and bring it to the surface as 'crime'. A crime, however, is adjudicated by individualizing victims and perpetrators and by following through on procedures that rely on a limited range of specifiably legal facts governed by ideas of what constitutes 'good' evidence, especially with regard to motive. Though animated by a sense of social justice, Dighe was constrained by these limits: he focused on how an errant police machinery and the corruption of a PSI resulted in procedural inconsistencies and injustice against the Sirsats.

Here we might note affinities between the individualizing of the court case and the individualizing of the public scandal as shared forms of publicity: in each case, publicity has the capacity to render the banal exceptional, thus producing an almost illicit glimpse of the order of things. Both the court case and the public scandal individualize a stretch of human action as out of the ordinary, yet bring to the surface the 'unknown well-known' of ever-present deep structures of caste sociality and violation.

The difference between everyday practice and expert knowledge is not only a difference in power, but also in perception. The contextual and the conventional are different semiotic dimensions: the former privileges perceptual distinctions valued in daily life, those of 'common sense' or what Bourdieu refers to as *doxa;* while the conventional recesses singularity by privileging sequence, pattern, and regularity. The legal process of generalizing instances of violence into types of crime also incorporates singular acts into conventions of penal categorization.[25] In 'Sirasgaon', governmental efforts to acknowledge social reality and translate the experiential everyday of caste violence into crime was successful in generating publicity and visibility for the 'new' category of caste violence. What we recognize clearly as ritualized humiliation and public exhibition of gendered vulnerability was

occluded by judicial narratives of crime and victimhood in which the constitutive fact of sexual violation remained invisible and unsayable.

Performative Violence at the *Ves*

If the sexualized frames of revenge and retribution found no adequate legal representation, could they be spoken at all? On 4 May 1997, I met with one of the Sirsat women, whom I call Y. She was living outside Sirasgaon in a government slum development where Dalit and Muslim homes sat side by side. An RPI activist introduced me, saying that I wanted to 'discuss the incident [*ghatane baddal bolayca* ahe]', before leaving us alone. Y. was astonished and repeatedly asked why I was interested in something so old. How did I even know about it? When I told her about my extended search for the legal judgments, she sat down and looked off thoughtfully into the distance and then gestured for me to sit.

The Sirasgaon incident remained symbolically charged, thirty years after the fact. Y. wouldn't look at my face, her eyes fixed somewhere beyond me as she began to speak without any questions or interjections from me. She spoke about the men who had come to the Sirsat hut, and she pointed to her breasts and sari, saying 'they removed this [he *sagale kadle*], unable to speak directly about what happened. She talked about being dragged outside her house and through the village to the *ves*, her hands gesturing wildly to the various parts of her body that had been beaten by the men. The traumatic incident was vividly etched in the woman's memory, though none of her grown children knew about it. They knew, however, that she never wanted to visit the village of Sirasgaon and that they were also prohibited from doing so. Revisiting the incident resuscitated her humiliation and, more importantly, the fear of continued reprisal. At our first meeting, she noted bitterly that many people had come to speak with the Sirsat women when the incident first occurred, but that there had been hell to pay after the activists left. When I visited Y.'s home a few days later, she did not want to discuss the incident further.

As I demonstrated in chapter 5, when a political context enables violence to become a site for staging and challenging identities, such political violence can also transform context, creating and destroying frames of intelligibility. The semantic excess of political violence reveals and transforms symbolic formations of body, community, and history. I attend to an aspect of 'Sirasgaon' almost overlooked in court in order to understand the women's humiliation as the performative violence of symbolic forms, where sexual humiliation represents the archaic within modern repertoires of violence. I do so by attending to the public exhibition of the women at the *ves*. By this route, we can explore the place of sexual humiliation within a social-symbolic order without compromising the specific identity (and traumatic experience) of the subject of violence.

In most villages in Marathwada, the residential area for Dalits, called the Maharwada of Baudhwada, is usually located at the southern end of the village, and it is almost always outside the village boundary. In Sirasgaon, the Maharwada abutted the southeast. A government primary school sat along the eastern side of the village boundary, along with a separate hand pump that was used by Mahar Dalits and other lower castes. I gathered, on my visit to Sirasgaon, that Dalits there were not in the habit of celebrating Ambedkar's birthday. Nor did his bust sit next to a figure of the Buddha, something I had come to expect from visits to other villages.

In most of Marathwada villages I visited during 1996–7 the *ves* was close to a temple to Maruti or Hanuman. This was usually an openair structure with a large stone image of Maruti installed at its centre and painted a metallic saffron or dabbed with the *haldi* and *kumkum* (turmeric and vermilion) used for religious worship. In Sirasgaon, the *ves* was located in the northwestern quadrant of the village and required a walk through the village if one was to get to it from the Maharwada. The Sirasgaon *ves* comprised two large blocks of black stone about three feet apart. In conversation, I was told that animal sacrifices often took place at the *ves*, with the meat being shared between the villagers.

The *ves* is a ritually charged space. According to *Molesworth's Marathi Dictionary*, the *ves*(f) is '1. The gate of a village; 2. (Because it used to be enforced by closing the gates) payment of the government revenue; 3. A gate or door of a yard or other enclosure.' Thus, a *veskar* is 'the person appointed to keep the gate of a village. He is usually a Mahar. His nightly patrol around the village is known as *gast ghalne*.' This ties the Mahar caste to guarding the village boundary,[26] and presents the *veskar* as the excommunicated figure who reinforces village solidarity.

The Sirasgaon incident resurrected the historically significant centrality of the *ves*, a symbolic boundary that both marked off the village from the public world and reaffirmed the Mahar's role in consolidating village solidarity. As the next chapter makes clear, the significance of the Mahar *veskar* as a boundary-marking figure was related to memories of a precolonial past when Mahars were sacrificed at the threshold of forts or villages to commemorate military conquest. Parading the women around the *ves* overturned this historical relationship between *ves* and Mahar. If the male *veskar* protected the village to guarantee the normal village order, the women's humiliation at the *ves* was a sign that things were out of place. At a moment of crisis, 'tradition' was reversed. Marking the village boundary through the women's bodies and then parading the women around the *ves* in the daytime symbolically reconstituted a *threatened* village solidarity and performed a collective punishment of Dalits occasioned by improper interpenetration of the Kale and Sirsat family dramas. An especially humiliating form of public chastisement, the events at the *ves* also emasculated the men of the Sirsat family, who were unable to protect their women.

The Sirasgaon incident challenged the traditional order. Though upper-caste Marathas had shamed the women to reassert their hegemony, they deserted the village when the 'atrocity' became public. Everyone did. The Sirsat family left Sirasgaon to escape the vengeance of the upper castes. They became migrant labourers working in the sugarcane fields of southern Maharashtra. The involved Maratha families left the village to live on their agricultural lands. Rather than

preserving village solidarity at the *ves*, the incident transformed the social order because of its notoriety and the involvement of the police and Dalit activists. Instead of burying violence more deeply within a seemingly consensual structure of upper-caste privilege and Dalit subordination, the women's ritualized humiliation revealed deep social cleavages and politicized violence. The symbolic significance of the *ves* remained intact. However, the archaic siting of violent humiliation brought forth a response that reveals the effects of state and Dalit politicization in altering communal solidarities.

While this understanding of the Sirasgaon spectacle reminds us of the continued symbolization of the Dalit body through violence, it also points beyond itself. How do gender, caste, and sexuality together structure the inscrutability of particular forms of violence and humiliation?

Caste and the Sexual Economy

> Where society is already well-knit by other ties, marriage is an ordinary incident of life. But where society is cut asunder, marriage as a binding force becomes a matter of urgent necessity. *The real remedy for breaking Caste is inter-marriage. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of Caste.*—**B.R. Ambedkar, The Annihilation of Caste, in BAWS, vol. 1, 67**

In arguing that intercaste marriage could eradicate caste, B.R. Ambedkar highlighted the critical role of female sexuality in the reproduction of caste.[27] In addition to the ban on intercaste marriage, sati (enforced widowhood) and child marriage regulated the lives of upper-caste women, all mechanisms Ambedkar thought maintained the ratio between men and women by ridding the system of 'surplus' women. The structural functionalism of Ambedkar's early account of caste and sexuality notwithstanding, he saw that caste power was gendered and he addressed how sexual regulation reproduced caste relations. His profound investment in the Hindu Code Bill reflects Ambedkar's long-held views of the constitutive relationship between

caste and sexual regulation. The call for intercaste marriage was an effort to reconceive the relationship between Hindu marriage and the caste order. It remains a radical intervention to this day.[28] Marriage was a hinge, articulating the social and sexual orders, but it also regulated sexuality through caste norms. Intercaste marriages were intrinsically political acts because they acknowledged desire between castes. Unlike informal sexual relations against which Dalit activists had virulently campaigned, intercaste marriage was a sanctioned transgression.

Ambedkar's commitment to defining intercaste marriages as Hindu marriages, instead of as civil marriages registered under the Special Marriages Act, is significant. He envisioned that by breaking the association of women with the reproduction of caste community, intercaste marriage would annihilate caste distinctions. We can appreciate the strategic significance of keeping intercaste marriage as *Hindu* marriage when we recognize that intercaste marriage asserted the sanctity of marriage as a social form, but recalibrated the relationship between caste and gender from *within* the institution of marriage. Intercaste marriage would annihilate caste by rewriting the sexual contract.

The legacy of anti-caste critique is heterogeneous and discontinuous: it contains critical as well as status quo perspectives on gender and sexuality. Despite Ambedkar's perspicacious discussion of the relationship between caste and sexuality, he also largely conceived the Dalit political subject as male. Female persons played important roles in political action and collective protest to be sure, but they were also held to bourgeois conceptions of respectability and female propriety.[29] The history of Dalit emancipation charted in my book addresses caste masculinity as a neglected issue, one pursued in powerful critiques by Dalit feminists today.[30] In chapter 1, however, I cautioned against assimilating this critique into existing paradigms of the feminist subject. As a consequence of appropriating colonial-Brahmanical paradigms of autonomy and self-sovereignty that assumed an upper-caste, male subject of rights, Dalit and non-Brahmin political subject-formation predicated the upward mobility of Dalit and lower-caste men

on the reform of family and of female subjects. Thus, Ambedkar's critique of caste and gender regulation, while it focused on the reproduction of upper-caste male privilege through the control of gendered bodies, also has important implications for challenging the historical association of gender control with community identity. Rather than proposing a model of female enfranchisement that posits the political rights of women against the authority of community—the general model of female suffrage—Ambedkar suggests a mechanism to dissolve the identity of 'community' through intercaste marriage and thus secure the sexual rights of women *as political rights.* Ambedkar's focus on intercaste marriage is a foil against which to reconsider the sexual reproduction of caste power.

Upper-caste women were prominently regulated. What happened, however, to Dalit and lower-caste women who were not governed by ritually prescribed forms of social death and corporal violence? By what mechanisms were they disciplined? Dalit and lower-caste women have long suffered sexual violation as caste exploitation and forced sexual labour. As a Satnami (Chamar) said, 'The upper castes would not touch us. They would never eat with us. But they were always ready to fornicate. For "doing it" our women were not untouchable. . . . Even after licking the private parts of Satnami women, they would not lose their purity.'[31] In fact, sexual violence performed a pedagogical function in socializing men and women, Dalit and caste Hindu alike, into caste norms. The specific relationship of stigmatized existence with sexed subjectivity accentuates the consistent illegibility of sexual violence as caste violence, even as it renders sexual violation a definitive aspect of gendered Dalit personhood. The paradox of sexual violation as constitutive of female identity and invisible to categorization is precisely what makes the Sirasgaon case so troubling. This is reflected in the event's performed specificity—the stripping and parading of Dalit women at the *ves*—together with its generic banality—another case of violence against women. One way to address the paradox is to examine the sexual economy of caste as a specific instance of the sexual contract.

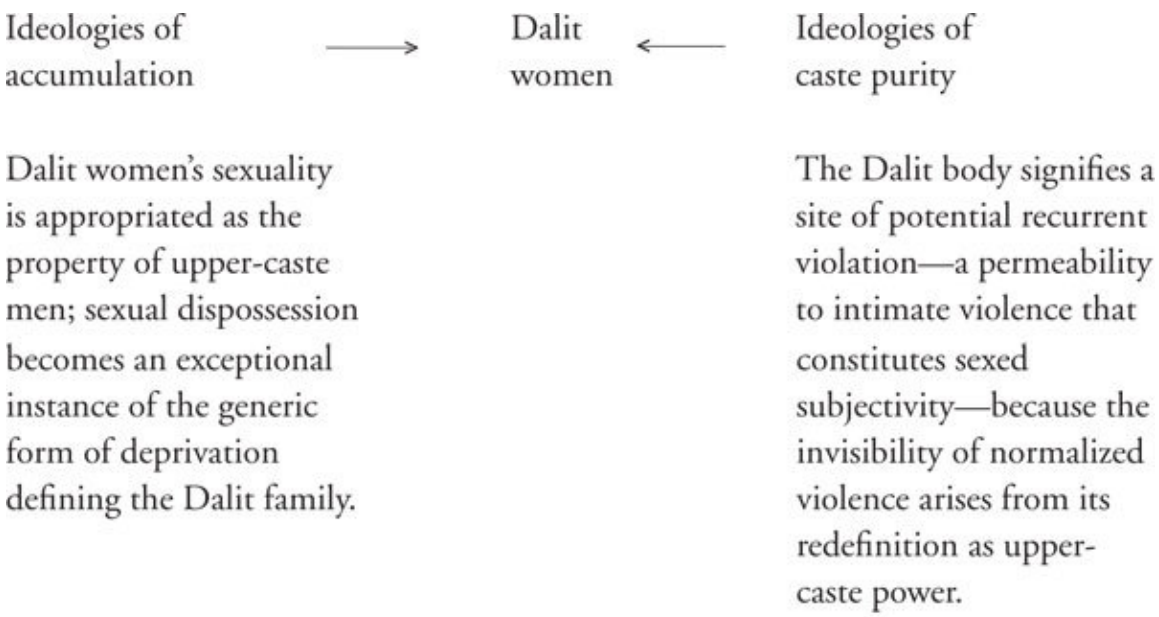
The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss famously argued that marriage lay at the interface of nature and culture and that it was animated by the logic of gift exchange, which produced a traffic in women between wife givers and wife takers: social status derived from sexual commerce. In traditional studies of kinship, the incest taboo is the origin of permissible sex, while sexual exchange produces social intimacy between strangers. As feminist critics of Lévi-Strauss have noted, the mythic chatter for the emergence of sexual/social order in Western societies, the Oedipus myth, is a narrative of *family violence* through which the narrative of subject-formation and sexual difference are conjoint. For instance in the classic Freudian reading, the man's desire for the mother also propels identification (and conflict) with the father. Meanwhile, the lack of the penis and desire for the father force the daughter to accommodate herself to 'lesser rights' from childhood. Jacques Lacan's argument that language is structured by desire and lack, and by the symbolic order of law, rendered virtual what in Freud remained a set of associations between biological difference and sexed subjectivity. This allows us to see that the Freudian family drama is less a literal description of existing conditions than the staging of a paradigmatic moment when nature is transformed into culture, a thought experiment through which Western societies produce a narrative about sociosexual order. One can remain agnostic, even critical about the implied universality of this form, while simultaneously acknowledging the model's power to connect sexual subordination with heterosexual desire.[32] One may also note that unlike—and in opposition to—commodity exchange, sexual exchange is typically read in two ways, as prepolitical *and* as inaugurating political society. Kinship is understood to be the chronologically anterior, primitive version of political citizenship.[33]

Of what use are theories of the relationship between sexual exchange and social formation in addressing the specific economy of caste? Caste is the effect of sexual regulation. Therefore, sexual relationships within and between caste communities are a nodal point through which caste supremacy is reproduced or challenged. Sexual desire and violence *across* caste is the constitutive outside to the regulatory order of caste

and kinship. Thus the sexual economy of caste is complex: it prohibits all men from viewing all women as potential sexual partners, but also gives upper-caste men the right to enjoy Dalit and lower-caste women. Indeed, knowledge of this is a public secret, normalized as privilege by the upper castes and experienced as a shameful secret by its victims. Sexual violence is a negative but necessary effect of ideas regarding caste purity and social respectability that regulate the normative caste order. This is because caste hegemony is secured in two ways: by regulating caste respectability and by justifying flagrant transgression as a form of upper-caste privilege. The doubled economy of caste is at work in the exchange of women within the caste community and in an informal circuit of sexual liaison with women seen as always-already amenable to sexual violation as a right. The putatively closed circuit of marriage and respectability is thus destabilized by this 'other' economy of sexual violation/pleasure that equates caste privilege with the availability of lower-caste women as upper-caste property.[34] Although marriage regulates caste purity to some degree, the sexual economy of caste is intrinsically unstable. The problematic permeability of violence and desire, of rape and marriage, intimates that sexual violence is caste violence because it operates as the prerogative of upper-caste men.[35]

The brutal violence against Dalit men accused of desiring upper-caste women further illuminates the double jeopardy of sexual violence as caste violence. If Dalits' political awareness has intensified caste conflict, the adjudication of the Sirasgaon incident suggests that a crucial but invisible consequence of Dalit politicization is that the desire for upward mobility was recast as a desire for sexual access to upper-caste women. Sirasgaon re-enacted an archaic form of punishment for two small acts of resistance perceived as political challenges: Kishan's conversation with Shevantibai, perceived as an insult to Yedu, and the Sirsat women's efforts to inform Shevantibai of her husband's misbehaviour. In addition to everything else, exhibiting the women to Shevantibai reaffirmed the sanctity of upper-caste women as caste property, out of bounds to Dalit and lower-caste men. Just the hint of transgressive desire was catastrophic; it became an alibi for anti-Dalit violence.

The pernicious euphemization of sexual violence as a form of uppercaste male desire also permits upper castes to imagine that fantasies of sexual possession, or of sexual violation of upper-caste women, are important vectors for consolidating Dalit caste masculinity. Remaining agnostic about the veracity of this assumption, I suggest, rather, that the perverse logic of caste's sexual economy is such that the violation of Dalit women as a matter of right and the violent disciplining of Dalit men are two sides of the same coin. As the Sirasgaon incident reveals, *both* are acts of sexual violence and indices of caste power. This duplicity of caste and sex makes apparent why the specificity of sexual violence is so often lost when it is redefined as caste violence, and why a feminist focus on sexual violence tends to ignore its specificity as violence against *Dalit* women. When sexed subjectivity is joined with stigmatized existence, sexual violence becomes existentially overdetermined and legally inscrutable. We can see below an illustration of the manner in which ideas of personhood and of property can be perverted by violence against Dalit women to reaffirm their identity as *Dalit* and as *Dalit women*. My aim here is to reflect on how a more generic set of arguments about sexual subordination might be operationalized to reflect the specific experience of Dalit women, who are marked by the disabilities of caste and gender.


Ideologies of accumulation
Dalit women
Ideologies of caste purity
Dalit women's sexuality is appropriated as the property of upper-caste men; sexual dispossession becomes an exceptional instance of the generic form of deprivation defining the Dalit family.
The Dalit body signifies a site of potential recurrent violation—a permeability to intimate violence that constitutes sexed subjectivity—because the invisibility of normalized violence arises from its redefinition as upper-caste power.

After Sirasgaon: Sexual Violence as Caste Violence

Despite its scandalous existence as an exceptional event, 'Sirasgaon' was not an anomaly. More recent examples of sexual violence show how dominant structures of sexuality and caste sociality—the structuring violence of caste—continue to be exposed in spectacles of violence. More poignantly they remind us that violence can be reintegrated into social life even in the face of redress and more developed state discourses of 'atrocity' than existed in 1963.

The ghastliest incidence of sexual violence in Maharashtra to date is perhaps the massacre of 29 September 2006, in the village of Khairlanji, Bhandara district. The incident began as a land grab by local agriculturalists—of the five acres the Dalit family owned, two acres had been taken over to make way for a road, and the remaining three were in danger of expropriation. It ended with the mutilation and rape of forty-four-year-old Surekha Bhotmange and her teenaged student daughter, Priyanka, and the brutal murder of Surekha's two sons, Roshan and Sudhir, aged nineteen and twenty-one. Again, Khairlanji highlights the paradoxical centrality of sexual violation as a mechanism of caste embodiment as well as the necessity of understanding the specificity of sexual violation through the signifying structures of Dalit stigma. Indeed the event addresses the complex materiality of violence as a political form and a perverse instance of (caste) intimacy.

By all accounts, the Bhotmanges were an upwardly mobile Dalit family. Priyanka was a school topper studying political science and sociology, and one of her brothers was a college graduate; both he and his visually impaired brother earned extra money by working as labourers. Surekha challenged the initial land grab with the help of a cousin. When he was attacked, Surekha identified the attackers and had them arrested. Sadly, these were the same men who returned with others to massacre the Bhotmange family. The family was paraded naked, beaten, stoned, sexually abused, and then murdered by a group of men from the *kunbi* and *kalar* agricultural castes. Surekha and her daughter Priyanka were bitten, beaten black and blue, and gang-raped in full public view for an hour before they died. Iron rods and sticks

were later inserted in their genitalia. The private parts and faces of the young men were disfigured. 'When the dusk had settled, four bodies of this dalit family lay strewn at the village choupal [square], with the killers pumping their fists and still kicking the bodies. The rage was not over. Some angry men even raped the badly mutilated corpses of the two women.'[36] The bodies were later scattered at the periphery of the village.

It took more than a month for the news to spread. Internet discussion groups in the so-called Dalit blogosphere played a vital role. Web versions of the event circulated far and wide, as did photographs of the mutilated bodies of the victims, compensating for the lack of coverage by mainstream news media. Dalit and grassroots organizations such as the Ambedkar Centre for Justice and Peace and the Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti filed petitions with the government. By November, photographs of the victims' bodies were pasted on the walls of Dalit *bastis* (residential areas), and large rallies were held in Bhandara, Nagpur, Aurangabad, and Pune. Women's groups staged major rallies, and women came out in large numbers to protest. Police beat protesters and opened fire on crowds at these rallies and killed at least one person in Amravati. Dalit politicians were severely criticised for failing to intervene and seek justice for Dalit victims.[37] What came to light were police cover-up, bureaucratic mishandling, and utter disregard for justice for the victims.[38] Ultimately, all the eleven accused received bail on 30 December 2006, and three of them were acquitted on 15 September 2008. None were prosecuted under the POA Act.[39]

This time around two things were distinctive: the inaction of the Dalits associated with mainstream political parties, and the follow-up to anti-Dalit violence by the counterviolence of Dalits. Media exposure of the Khairlanji incident was closely followed by news that a statue of B.R. Ambedkar had been desecrated in Kanpur, in Uttar Pradesh, which provoked retaliatory violence in Mumbai and elsewhere in Maharashtra. We have seen already that Ambedkar images have played a crucial role in the constitution of a Dalit popular. At stake has been Ambedkar's singular individuality, the agentive power of self-

determination to remake the Dalit self and thereby challenge the social invisibility and humiliation to which the community was relegated. Though Ambedkar statues are a social fact in almost every village in Maharashtra, the erection of statues in other parts of the country is more recent. In 1997 alone, 15,000 statues of Ambedkar were installed across Uttar Pradesh, provoking widespread conflict with caste Hindus who saw this as a challenge to their hegemony. Thus it is not important whether the Kanpur statue's desecration was indeed the cause of Dalit counterviolence. More significant is the statues' role as symbolic currency in the resignification of public space.

Dalit rage was described in a number of ways as it reverberated across state borders: as a response to the statue's description in faraway Kanpur; as retaliation for Khairlanji; and finally, as a symptom of Dalits' deep-rooted anger against an irresponsible and uncaring state. Dalit militancy was transformed from remaking the Dalit self to destroying the images and institutions of caste exclusion: protesters burnt the famous Deccan Queen, the Mumbai-Pune express train that ferries while-collar workers between the two cities and is a symbol of bourgeois, upper-caste respectability; suburban trains were burnt, as were a hundred buses; and there was stone-throwing in cities across the state. That violence was soon followed by an important commemorative event, the fiftieth anniversary of Ambedkar's death. Each anniversary is typically observed in Mumbai on 6 December by up to a million people: many travel ticketless or walk for hundreds of miles, braving hardship and hunger. The event is known for the highly disciplined crowds who visit the consecrated ground, the *chaitya bhoomi,* in Babasaheb's memory.

The portrayal of Dalit rage at this time is significant. The Maharashtra state government showed its deep ignorance about the solemnity of this occasion for Dalits across the country and anticipated further violence on that day. Though nothing happened, fear of a violent Dalit mob was fuelled by news media: they predicted a siege of the city, warning that Mumbai residents could be potential victims of Dalit unruliness and random acts of violence. For Dalits, Khairlanji 'was the end of imagination', as one activist put it—an apocalyptic event without any

adequate frame of representaion.[40] For the state machinery, however, the violence of Khairlanji was quickly replaced by the threat of Dalit counterviolence. Sexual violence, the desecration of a statue, Dalit counterviolence, and political commemoration produced a field of signification animated by acts of (symbolic) substitution and overdetermination.

Along with the power of violent reciprocity came heightened sensitivity to sexual violence against Dalit women. By the 1990s, Dalit feminists were arguing that it was impossible to understand the sexual violation of Dalit women except as a recurrent stigmatization of Dalits. They challenged upper-caste feminists for ignoring the central role of caste in regulating female sexuality and sexual access.[41] Sexual violence had thus attained semiotic density as a distinguishing feature of caste violence and a sign of its discursive centrality in framing Dalit identity, even when the meaning and interpretation of violence differed from victims to perpetrators. The violent excess of the Bhotmanges' murder and the ritual description constituted caste punishment through the symbolic degradation of gendered Dalit bodies.

In attributing to violence a purely instrumental or utilitarian function —seeing it as a reaction to Dalit economic mobility or political mobilization of Dalits—we ignore the fact that violence continues regardless of efficacy because it is also pedagogical instruction in a symbolic order obscured by modern state forms and discourses. The brutal ritual desecration of the gendered Dalit body is a technology of violence that resurrects archaic forms of sexual violence and punishment in direct proportion to the politicization of Dalits. From Sirasgaon to Khairlanji then, the state action of defining the vulnerable Dalit subject and outlawing her violation has been met by counter response on the 'creative' semiotic ground of violation and violence that relocates struggles over Dalit identity to streets, homes, and to spaces otherwise invisible to the state's modern non-archaic glance. From 'Sirasgaon', an early atrocity in which the legal armature to name, contain, and control the field of popular representation was nascent, to this more recent case governed by the 1989 Prevention of Atrocities

Act, the extremity of violence suggests that its symbolic significance and semiotic density are deepened as a consequence of the politicization of violence.[42]

8

Caste as Maratha

Social Categories, Power, and Region in Colonial South Asia*

Prachi Deshpande

One of the striking features of the colonial encounter in western India and the transformation in vocabularies of community and political identity was a change in the understanding and usage of the category 'Maratha'. The term recalls a precolonial warrior heritage, embodied most strikingly in the figure of the equestrian—and now ubiquitous—Shivaji, and continues to signal, in popular parlance as well as scholarly literature, the historical polity that resisted Mughal expansion into the Deccan in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Its more dominant usage in modern Maharashtra, especially in the nineteenth century, however, has been as the marker not of an entire polity, but of a specific social group: the Marathas (often referred to as 'Maratha-Kunbis' as well), who are today the politically dominant, upper-caste group in the state. This dominance of the Maratha caste in postcolonial Maharashtra and its expression in terms of land control, political alliances and rural networks of power has been well documented by political scientists.[1] Although detailed historical

studies of the non-Brahman movement have pointed to multiple imaginings of what and whom 'Maratha' represented over the colonial period, scholarship on the postcolonial period has often tended to project the category's current avatar unproblematically into the colonial and precolonial past. The historiographical implications of the transformation of a broad, historical category to a narrow, specific caste group have attracted less attention.

The changing meanings of 'Maratha', however, may be seen as an example of the historicity of social categories, especially caste categories, in modern South Asia. Recent interventions in the study of caste, despite various ideological differences of emphasis, have highlighted and documented its historicity and the impact of the colonial encounter in producing the practice and politics of caste identities as we know them today.[2] In particular, scholars have shown an increasing interest in exploring the influence of colonial enumeration and classification practices from the later nineteenth century and the colonial representative framework (which relied heavily on such practices) on caste politics and identity. Perhaps the most valuable outcome of this shift from the 'immutability' of caste to its 'modernity' is the rejection of an over-generalized, uniform approach to caste based on its normative aspects and the acknowledgement of messy contradictions and geographical variations in the development and practice of caste identities.

In light of these recent interventions, this article tracks the transformation of the category 'Maratha' from its dominant precolonial register as a historical, military ethos to the bounded marker of a caste group. The principal focus here is on the discursive contestations that marked the content and meaning of this category in the early twentieth century and its growing importance in structures of colonial policy. The central argument the article makes is that the caste-based register of 'Maratha' that came to dominate by the late colonial period was shaped through a complex, interactive process both by colonial policies of classification and representation, as well as Maharashtrian attempts to engage with new vocabularies of identity. It not only surveys the many

changes the category underwent in the discourse of the non-Brahman movement, but also tracks the category's genealogy through a series of colonial ethnographic writings and official policy, thus pointing to the interpenetration of both discourses. In doing so, the article attempts to historicise the category Maratha and emphasises more broadly the importance of locating the modern history of caste and its encounter with colonialism in regional/local contexts.

'Maratha' in Precolonial and Early Colonial Contexts

Details of the origins of the term 'Maratha' are still relatively unknown, but it has been argued that these lie in the long period of Muslim rule in the Deccan between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially in the states of Ahmednagar and Bijapur. 'Marathas' were initially Marathi-speaking units in the armies of these states and gradually came to identify, by Shivaji's time in the seventeenth century, the many local lineages and elites who had found avenues for social mobility through civil and military employment in these states. Many of these chieftains, who claimed Rajput ancestry and descent from a set of elite 96 Kshatriya families, called themselves 'Marathas', but the vast numbers of Kunbi cultivators of western India who served under them also belonged to 'Maratha' armies.[3]

Early British commentators such as James Grant Duff or John Malcolm used the term 'Maratha' to encompass the entire polity that held sway over western and central India in the eighteenth century.[4] Thomas Broughton's entertaining, if somewhat acerbic, 1813 *Letters from a Maharatta Camp* described at length the 'Maratha legend of fear' and repeatedly referred to the Marathas as a 'race' and 'tribe' full of rather regrettable military practices and values: they were, according to him, 'deceitful, treacherous, narrow-minded, repacious [*sic*] and notorious liars.'[5] He understood them as being Hindus and found their riotous participation in Mohurrum ceremonies 'curious', but at another point also described Baboo Khan, a Muslim, as 'a Mahratta chief of some rank and consideration.'[6] Broughton did recognize a general

hierarchy among the Marathas, describing 'two grand classes' of Brahmans and 'all the inferior *castes* of the Hindoos, but composed chiefly *of Aheers* or shepherds, and *Koormees* or tillers of the earth. . . . The various *castes* of the second class are freer from religious prejudice, as to eating, than say any other Hindoos.'[7]

Richard Jenkins, Resident at the court of Nagpur and author of the 1827 *Report on the Territories of the Raja of Nagpore,* however, was more aware that 'Maratha' itself might be flexibly applied: 'The term Mahratta, though applied by the other tribes to the inhabitants of Maharashtra in general, seems among the Maharattas themselves to be limited to a few distinct classes only. The Jhari and Mahratta Kunbis are considered the genuine Mahrattas by all other classes: besides these the term is more particularly applied to the numerous tribes and families from whom the most celebrated Maharatta leaders have sprung. The number of these families is . . . ninety-six.'[8]

Jenkins' comment aside, we do not have substantial contemporary evidence to indicate just how central this social category was, the different spheres in which it might have been most strongly invoked, or the degree to which it corresponded with jati divisions in the precolonial period. We do have some evidence that it was relatively flexible and open to appropriation by humbler, but enterprising families through military service, marital alliance opportunities, and negotiations with chiefs and rulers.[9] The most celebrated example of the Maratha claim to Kshatriya status was, of course, Shivaji himself, whose Vedic coronation in 1674 took place in the face of local Brahman protests about his uncertain jati origins. Sumit Guha's richly detailed and thorough discussion of the opportunities for upward mobility (including, in some cases, Rajput status) afforded to groups such as the Kolis and Mavlis through military service and engagement with successive regimes in Western India attests to the fact that this was a widespread phenomenon.[10] Recently, Philip Constable has also shown how Mahar soldiers participated in the precolonial military labour market through this open-ended, inclusive Maratha category signifying military *naukari.*[11]

Some eighteenth-century sources, however, suggest that this register of 'genuine' or 'most celebrated Mahrattas', with its attendant Kshatriya and Rajput ancestry claims, might well have been part of the broader military Maratha ethos itself. Numerous Marathi *bakhars* (chronicles) narrating important battles and family sagas were composed in this period; elsewhere I have argued that these texts not only commemorate important Maratha battles and warriors, but also articulate a code of honour and military-cultural values specific to Maratha warriors, often through an admixture of defiance and admiration for Rajput fighting skills and valour.[12] 'Rajput' and 'Maratha' in these narratives certainly appear as elite categories, but not as specific jati groups; instead, they are attributional terms embodying specific military values, with the former frequently serving as a category for emulation. As several works on the military labour market in medieval and early modern Indian have argued, Rajput/Kshatriya connections looked good on military résumés, something the Marathas were not unaware of;[13] the repeated references in the *bakhar* narratives to correct behaviour, prestige, valour, and Kshatriya dharma also underscored the fighting qualities and a code of honour for the top brass among the Maratha chiefs to celebrate and emulate, but not specifically a Maratha Kshatriya jati. For example, in the famous *Bhausahebanchi Bakhar,* one of the most riveting late eighteenth-century accounts of events leading up to Maratha defeat at Panipat in 1761, the chieftain Jayappa Shinde describes a skirmish between his forces and those of the Rajput chief Bijesing: 'These are Marwadi Rajputs, incredibly valorous; their bodies dance around even if they are beheaded . . . they also have a lot of firepower. Our people are faint of heart to begin with, with steel weapons, tied to a tree they will uproot it to try and flee . . . [The] courage [of the Marwari Hara Rajputs] was not surprising. But the Marathas did put up a brave show . . . many Marathas were killed, but even so, they must feel that blessed were the Rajput mothers that bore such sons.'[14]

Of course, this military, flexible register of 'Maratha' sits uneasily with the increased Brahmanization of the Maratha state under the Peshwas

in the eighteenth century. As is well known, the Peshwas vigorously sought to enforce jati boundaries and rules of jati discipline, especially relating to intermarriage, interdining and, most importantly, varna status claims.[15] Condemning the Peshwas' relegation of all nonBrahman groups, from high-ranking officials to ordinary people, to a low Shudra ritual status was also a prominent feature of non-Brahman polemic in the colonial period. Kshatriya claims by Maratha families after the Peshwa debacle, thus, are often seen as proof of this policy during Peshwa rule itself, but we really know very little about how this Brahmanization impacted the 'Maratha' category itself. It is remarkable that secondary works on the subject point to an overwhelming number of cases involving numerous Brahman jatis and ritual rules governing their mutual interaction and hierarchy, and an urgency to prevent groups such as the Prabhus and the Daivadnya Sonars (a goldsmith caste) from claiming higher varna status (Kayastha and Brahman respectively) and Vedic ritual.[16] The one Maratha/Kshatriya case that appears is the successful insistence of Jijabai, queen of Kolhapur from the Shankaracharya of Karveer, on Vedic death rites for her husband Sambhaji, much to the Shankaracharya's irritation.[17]

Examining the Peshwas' jati policy in detail is beyond the scope of this article, but it is worth noting the ways in which further research could qualify the rather general picture of this Brahmanization we currently have, and reveal a more subtle understanding of the 'Maratha' label under the Peshwas. As Susan Bayly has argued, Brahmanization across various successor states in the eighteenth century did not just mean a greater number of Brahmans in the administration, but also an urge and ability among various scribal and commercial groups to exploit opportunities in competing states through varna claims to Brahman, Kayastha, or Vaishya status.[18] Viewed in the context of the Peshwas' penchant for their own Chitpavan jati-fellows in political appointments as well as commercial linkages, it is worth exploring in greater detail whether such trends encouraged the regime to apply jati laws as much towards monitoring Brahman groups and preventing claims to similar qualities and qualifications by scribal competitors such

as the Prabhus, as towards keeping lower castes and those considered untouchable in their place in the varna hierarchy. Moreover, it is crucial to investigate further the success of these attempts in actually enforcing jati discipline and varna claims, and also the degree to which these were able to control both influential Maratha chiefs as well as ordinary Maratha or Kunbi soldiers and peasants. It is arguable that while such rules greatly increased the monitoring and exploitation of ordinary lower-caste folk, those considered untouchable, as well as the Brahman groups (especially Brahman women, as Uma Chakravarti has shown),[19] the military context and opportunities across the Maratha dominions in western and central India, especially outside the Peshwa's direct control, made the enforcing of Shudra status for Marathas, particularly the more influential ones, more difficult, thus keeping it open to appropriation and inclusion. A fascinating observation by Grant Duff in the opening pages of his work hints at how Peshwa concerns over jati might have had to do much more with emphasising Brahman exclusivity within the broader 'Maratha' military fold than demarcating a Maratha jati: 'the name Mahratta is applicable in some degree to all [the inhabitants of Maharashtra], when spoken of in contradistinction to men of other countries, but amongst themselves a Mahratta Brahmin will carefully distinguish himself from a Mahratta. That term, though extended to the Koonbees, or cultivators, is, in strictness, confined to the military families of the country, many of whom claim a doubtful, but not improbable descent from the Rajpoots.'[20]

To be a 'Maratha' in the precolonial period, then, was not to be part of an enumerable and bounded jati; depending on the context, the category could signify certain military values, the fierce armies that struck terror in people's threats, a political force in the subcontinent, or the elite of a broad military-cultural group. Broughton's account of the Maratha chiefs' celebrations and activities in the camps, Mohurrum and Holi, also suggests that expressing Hindu religious and caste difference in daily life was not central to being a Maratha, especially in a military environment.

In 1818, the British installed Pratapsinh, a descendant of Shivaji, as the nominal ruler at Satara to offset the recently deposed Peshwa and Brahman power in Pune. Company rule drastically reduced the military avenues for social mobility within western Indian society, and brought the Peshwai's attempts at policing jati discipline to an end. Both developments were to have profound consequences on the composition and understanding of the category 'Maratha'. The first couple of decades witnessed many such claims from various groups to higher varna status, both Kshatriya and Brahman, with rearguard action from Brahmans in Pune.[21] The most famous of these, of course, was Pratapsinh's successful use of the changed power configurations to claim Kshatriya and Vedic ritual status for his family, the Bhosales, and those of other Maratha chiefs in 1830, following a decade-long conflict with Brahman opinion in Pune.

As Rosalind O'Hanlon has argued, the public debate that finally secured Kshatriya status for Pratapsinh, however, brought to the fore and legitimized as acceptable ritual and dining practices that were rather loosely defined and widely practised in rural society (two of these mentioned are meat-eating and eating out of a common plate); these criteria thus enabled not just influential landed chiefs but also many modest Kunbi families to put forward Kshatriya claims, despite Pratapsinh's attempts to limit them to a small, elite circle.[22] From the mid-nineteenth century, contemporary Marathi observers commented on the increased tendency among upwardly-mobile Kunbi groups, some newly urbanized, but also those benefiting from the recent commercialization of agriculture, to take up the sacred thread and the appellation of 'Maratha'.[23] As we shall see below, colonial officials also began recording these ongoing changes from the 1870s onwards. It was, thus, in this assertion of higher jati status and ritual claims that the early colonial period witnessed attempts at social mobility; combined with the decline of military opportunities, these activities were significant in shifting the dominant martial register of 'Maratha' to that of a more bounded and exclusive community over the nineteenth century.

Early Non-Brahman Protest

The rise of low-caste protest against Brahman dominance in the later nineteenth century gave these activities a sharp political twist. The overwhelming dominance of Brahman groups in the new colonial order in Maharashtra and the preponderance of Brahmans in the nationalist middle classes have been well documented.[24] Another striking feature of the colonial encounter in this region was the strident presence in political and social discourses of narratives from the past, from the period that came to be known as 'Maratha history'. Themes and symbols from this past served as a prime cultural resource for different social groups to not only express both identity and difference, but to also imagine a modern, Maharashtrian regional identity.[25] B.G. Tilak's well-known invocation of Shivaji as a nationalist hero in the 1890s was one among many such uses of this history made by Brahman nationalists; in this narrative, the Maratha conflict with the Mughals and others was a patriotic one where all Marathi-speaking social groups worked together as Marathas. Despite disagreements within the broad Brahman nationalist position, these historical invocations were shot through with the idea of a natural caste hierarchy that placed Brahmans at the helm: the Brahman Peshwai served as the perfect example for the natural social leadership of Brahmans in Maharashtrian society.[26]

The low-caste critique spearheaded by activists like Jotirao Phule focused, of course, on the overwhelming presence of Brahmans in every walk of life and the reinscription of Brahman social and ritual power under the new colonial order through privileged access to Western education and employment in the colonial government. Writers and activists from various non-Brahman groups, however, also invoked the Maratha past in their protests against Brahman dominance, laying bare the tacit assumptions of Brahman leadership in many nationalist narratives. They sought to root the political position of the 'non-Brahman' in regional history and culture, and put forward their own versions of Maharashtra's traditions. In doing so they made the Maratha past a prime site for the articulation of caste conflict and identity. Shivaji's own conflict with local Brahmans in the seventeenth century

over his right to a Vedic coronation gave this protest a potent symbolic resource. In particular, the Peshwai's attempts at enforcing jati difference came to neatly represent the worst of Brahman dominance. As O'Hanlon has shown, the attempts to give the category 'Maratha' a new meaning were central to these processes. Non-Brahman activists disagreed sharply among themselves over the content and meaning of the category, but were successful in constructing it as an explicitly political expression of non-Brahman protest and a social category that specifically excluded Brahmans. James Grant Duff, for instance, came under criticism for giving his monumental historical work the misleading title *History of the Mahrattas,* when it contained information about many groups like Brahmans who were not really Marathas.[27]

One of the earliest of such attempts to exclude Brahmans from the 'Marathas' category was by Narayan Meghaji Lokhande.[28] In an article titled 'Are the Brahmans Marathas?' in the *Din Bandhu* of 17 January 1886, Lokhande criticized the Governor of Bombay, Lord Harris, for using 'Maratha' to denote all Marathi-speakers.[29]

> Maratha means those of the Kshatriya *varna.* In this Kshatriya *varna*, there are ninety six families, and many sub-families within these. The people who were born into these families are the true Marathas (Kshatriyas). Those who hold surnames from among these families can become Marathas; other people can never do so. . . . If, in this country of Maharashtra, the Brahmans can become Marathas, then even the Muslims and other people could call themselves Marathas. There is not to be found amongst those who call themselves Brahmans the similarity in manners and customs, deities and religion, and in families and lineage, which there is amongst all the Maratha people . . . We can never ever allow the Brahmans to take the liberty of calling themselves Marathas.[30]

As is apparent from the above quotation, he acknowledged the elite nature of the Maratha category with its ninety-six families, but allowed for its extension to include families of other castes who had the same surnames and could, thereby, 'become' Marathas. The fact that many

such surnames were common across rural caste groups made this a significant extension. He attempted, like Phule, to yoke the ongoing Sanskritizing tendencies within rural society to a radical edge, but it is important to note that he did not clearly specify that all of rural society could belong to his Maratha community. Equally importantly, he made it clear that the Muslims had no place in it. Despite its affirmation of a core Maratha elite of ninety-six families, however, Lokhande's understanding of the category Maratha remained one of the most radical within non-Brahman ideology. In 1887, he formed the Maratha Aikyecchu Sabha (Society for Maratha Unity) to ensure that the demands of education made for Marathas was suitably broad based.[31] Adroitly, he avoided mentioning specific caste groups and focused instead on wresting the legacy of Shivaji from Brahmans.

Other non-Brahmans were more explicit than Lokhande. For the Deccan Maratha Education Association (DMEA), one of the many non-Brahman organizations in the late nineteenth century, Maratha meant the cluster of elite Marathas and humbler Kunbi families linked through kinship; it excluded other agricultural castes like the Malis, who were very active in non-Brahman politics. The DMEA sought to claim the historical heritage of the Maratha struggle for this cluster, arguing that 'the Maratha and Kunbi population form the muscle and bone of native society. Their helplessness and ignorance is a national disgrace. . . . This condition of things is by no means an inevitable evil. At one time, not very distant in the past, they numbered among them some of the renowned leaders of the Maharashtrian armies, and many filled its ranks. In fact, these classes were the mainstay of the Maratha power in its palmy [*sic*] days.'[32] Another organization called 'the Society for the Maratha caste for putting forward the Dharma of Kshatriyas and for the raising of funds for that Dharma' invoked a military past to claim the category for an even more limited group of families: 'The name Maratha has really only ever been given to those who were Kshatriyas. All other people were happy to accept the name of their trade as their caste-name; but the name of Maratha has come to be given permanently to all those who have kept their mastery of their own land and who take pride in putting their lives at stake to protect it. Our habit of using Maratha

for our caste name is really a matter of great joy: it means that our very name proclaims that we are the people of this land of our birth.'[33]

O'Hanlon has argued, quite rightly, that it was precisely to avoid such Sanskritizing tendencies and the resultant cleavages between various low-caste groups that the most creative and far-sighted of non-Brahman thinkers, Jotirao Phule consciously avoided the category 'Maratha' in his imagination of a rural, non-Brahman solidarity. Phule used 'Shudra' as well as 'Kshatriya' (derived from *kshetra* or land to denote aboriginal inhabitants of the land) to evoke this solidarity and a generalised sense of pride and bravery.[34] It is important to note, however, that Phule's ingenious interpretation of 'Kshatriya', too, remained inconoclastic, even within the non-Brahman movement. As we shall see, successive polemicists preferred and advanced more conventional varna connotations of the term, which increasingly covered only a small, elite section of non-Brahmans.

'Maratha' in the Early Twentieth Century

In this period, the non-Brahman movement took the contestation of historical narratives from the relatively sedate sphere of newspapers into the streets and the public arenas of the Ganpati and Shivaji festivals. Dressed up like Maratha soldiers in the *Chhatrapati mela,* non-Brahman youth penned ballads and songs that claimed 'Maratha' as a source of non-Brahman pride and heaped scorn on the Peshwas by holding them responsible for losing Maratha sovereignty to the British. Through strong, colourful language, these songs depicted Brahman attempts to be a part of the Maratha past as illegitimate:

> Awaken O Marathas, this is a time of freedom, awaken to your glory!
> Shiva-ba, who protected our faith is called Shudra by the beggar priests And yet we stand silent with our heads bowed! . . .
> Having fanned these flames the priesthood watches the fun
> Here is a traitor and you feel nothing?
> The beggar priests robbed you of freedom . . .
> And brought the glory of Satara to dust

Shivaji is our source of joy and spirit
Come and prove to the world your grit
Remember Shiva-ba and embrace your courage
Sing for your freedom, Har Har Mahadev[35]

At its peak in the early twentieth century, the non-Brahman movement came under the patronage of Chhatrapati Shahu, ruler of the princely state of Kolhapur and descendant of Shivaji, and underwent significant changes from the earlier days of Phule and Lokhande in both discourse and social participation. Shahu, who began supporting the cause after a bitter clash in the 1890s with Tilak and conservative Brahman opinion over the issue of Vedic rituals for his family, provided much-needed financial as well as symbolic support. In the later years of his reign, he also campaigned actively for the removal of untouchability, opening hostels and schools, and providing jobs for non-Brahmans.[36]

Shahu's position on caste was ambiguous: he championed an array of non-Brahman causes which had their defiance of Brahman authority as the common denominator. His campaign against untouchability and support for Ambedkar, for instance, was matched with a strident insistence on Vedic Kshatriya rights for the elite Marathas, including the establishment of a Kshatriya priesthood for Marathas to do away with Brahmans altogether in ritual life. Despite generous financial support to the Satyashodhak Samaj, he refused to become a member, choosing the less radical and Vedas-friendly Arya Samaj instead.

Several scholars have noted that in his personal attitudes and approach to caste divisions, Shahu became increasingly radical with time and often annoyed some of his close elite Maratha associates.[37] Shahu's leadership did serve to bring diverse discontents against Brahman authority under one cause, but another broad consequence of his championing of the Vedokta cause and other policies was that many newly-urbanized and respectable Kunbi families were attracted to the non-Brahman movement.[38] Gail Omvedt is right in arguing that Shahu himself, especially in his later years, sought a gradualist, liberal middle ground between the conservative and radical extremes of the non-Brahman movement, but the overall effect of his policies was to ensure

a predominance of elite Marathas, or well-off Kunbis seeking Maratha status, within non-Brahman politics. Benefiting from the cash crop boom in the early twentieth century, such upwardly mobile agricultural groups organized under the label 'Maratha' in a spate of Maratha caste conference eagerly patronised by Kolhapur and other Maratha princely states like Gwalior and Baroda. In Vidarbha in particular, the non-Brahman leadership was characterized by the participation of large landed Deshmukhs, who were economically powerful, but not generally accepted as being part of the older elite Maratha families entrenched in the Deccan; many of these strongly supported the elite Kshatriya classification of Marathas and lent support to such conferences. Several Patil Conferences, bringing together village headmen who were usually Marathas of some standing, were also held under the non-Brahman umbrella in the 1920s.[39]

Non-Brahmans also entered the formal political arenas of legal councils, cooperative credit societies, local boards and municipal councils in the early twentieth century. Given the severely restricted property and education franchise for elections to any government body in both Bombay and the Central Provinces at this time (roughly only a meagre 9 and 8 per cent of the population in the provinces respectively),[40] both candidates and electors were drawn overwhelmingly from the richer peasantry.[41] As Omvedt has shown in considerable detail, this increasingly elite dimension to the caste conferences in this period as well as in rural institutional power structures, therefore, heralded the dominance of well off, upwardly-mobile Maratha-Kunbis— increasingly organizing only as Marathas and claiming Kshatriya varna status—in the non-Brahman movement.[42]

This changing face of the movement, in its approach to 'Maratha' but also in composition, served to blunt the radical edge Phule, Lokhande and Satyashodhak ideology had given non-Brahman protest, and resulted in an increased ambivalence towards questions of untouchability and lower-caste unity. Contestations between radical and conservative activists over the definition and appropriation of

'Maratha', however, continued. Activists from other caste groups, such as the radical Pune-based writer and editor Mukundrao Patil, continued to take the Satyashodhak lines.[43] He bitterly criticized what he saw as an obsession with Kshatriya status, warning that it would one day bring to dust all the good work done by Phule's Satyashodhak Samaj.[44] In his writings, he emphasized an inclusive 'Maratha' category. At the other, conservative, end was the Amravati-based prolific writer K.B. Deshmukh, who was only concerned with claiming ritual Kshatriya status for the Marathas and uninterested in its application to the wider non-Brahman community. Deshmukh's immensely popular books on the history of the Marathas (A *History of the Maratha Kshatriyas, A New Sacred Thread for the Kshatriyas* and *The Kshatriyas and Vaishyas Face Off with the Brahmans)* focused on the upper-caste status, genealogies and surname lists of 'legitimate' Kshatriya families and analyses of Puranic texts for proof of this Kshatriya heritage. The rhetoric in such narratives was often indistinguishable from those of Brahman conservatives and Hindu nationalists in their defence of Vedic traditions, and statements of upper-caste difference against lower-caste groups and untouchables.[45]

These conflicts and contradictions in non-Brahman discourse and the ambiguities underlying Maratha were often papered over in the eagerness, especially on the part of young radicals in the 1920s such as Keshavrao Jedhe and the firebrand, short-lived Dinkarrao Javalkar, to put up a united non-Brahman front against conservative Brahman ideologies.[46] Jedhe was a fervent supporter of temple entry struggles for those considered untouchable, especially of Ambedkar's famous 1927 Satyagraha at the village water tank at Mahad. At the same time, he also participated in the Maratha claim for Kshatriya status led by Chhatrapati Shahu and the latter's Kshatriya priesthood. Like many other young activists, he participated in all these activities under the broad ambit of 'non-Brahmanism', ignoring the implications of such contradictions for the inequalities within non-Brahman society itself. In doing so, he ended up ratifying the growing idea that 'Maratha' was not an all-inclusive marker for all of rural society, but the term for the

peasant upper-caste elite now dominant in the non-Brahman movement. Despite Jedhe's support for Ambedkar, therefore, local Marathas strongly protested against the Mahad Satyagraha. They held a meeting to consider the readmission of their caste fellows, who were believed to have been 'polluted' by participating in the Satyagraha. Remarkably, Jedhe is reported as being present at this meeting as well.[47]

Non-Brahman newspapers of the early twentieth century, such as Shripatrao Shinde's *Vijayi Maratha* and Bhagwantrao Palekar's *Jagruti,* also provide clues to the growing preponderance of an elite Maratha peasant group in non-Brahman discourse.[48] Recurrent advertisements and announcements in these newspapers suggest that it was primarily well-off and educated Maratha and Maratha-Kunbi readers who patronized them. Matrimonial advertisements, for instance, were invariably from 'Maratha famil[ies] of high birth, seeking contacts with similar families.'[49] It is rarely that we see families from other lower-caste groups advertising in these papers, or a readiness among Maratha families to make contact with them. Also prominent are advertisements for a wide range of religious and pamphlet literature pertaining to Kshatriya ancestry—surname lists that one could consult to confirm such ancestry, guides to appropriate Vedic rituals, special Kshatriya almanacs for discerning Maratha families, and so on. One such advertisement for an almanac, published by the Shree Shivaji Kshatriya Vedic School, announced that it was attractive not only because all the major non-Brahman leaders had certified it, but also because it had beautiful pictures of Shivaji and Shahu in the cover.[50] Histories of elite Maratha families were also prominent.

Colonial Sociology and Representation

Let us now consider the development and impact of colonial sociological practices on the transformation of the category 'Maratha'. From the mid-nineteenth century, the development of the colonial state into a full-fledged bureaucratic apparatus heralded the construction of a much more varied and detailed body of official information about native society, history and culture through massive projects such as the

census, gazetteers and land surveys. These were comprehensive compilations of information on regional social groups, customs and rituals, religious beliefs, and theories of their origins and history. This body of information was important not only because of its detailed treatment of caste and ritual practice, but also because it laid claim to a much higher standard of scientific accuracy and finality.

Caste became in this bureaucratic project a much-valued index of patterns of behaviour, an idea that was fuelled not only by the colonial state's desire to predict and anticipate its subject population's actions, but also by the overwhelming influence of the theories of race and ethnology.[51] Bureaucratic information of all kinds, therefore, provided break-ups of statistics by caste with some information about the caste itself. For example, Dr H.V Carter wrote enthusiastically in a report on leprosy in the Bombay presidency in the early 1870s: 'The subject of caste is full of instruction to the antiquary and the ethnologist: it is a mine as yet unworked, but which holds information sufficient, by analysis of details, to explain many curious anomalies in the opinions and condition of the existing native races, if not to throw light on their proclivities.'[52] Early colonial writings had had much to say about the military proclivities of the Marathas and the category remained a favourite subject of the colonial sociological pronouncements that multiplied in the late nineteenth century. For instance, the second edition of the *Imperial Gazetteer,* published in 1885, stated: 'The Marathas have a distinct national individuality. They are an active, energetic race liable to religious enthusiasm and full of military ardour . . . the chief caste or tribe among them is the agricultural Kunbi . . . Shivaji himself belonged to this fighting class of the Kunbi peasantry. . . . Altogether the Marathas acknowledge upwards of two hundred castes, including thirty-four septs [sic] of Brahmans.'[53] Although the *Imperial Gazetteer* retained the earlier idea of the Marathas as a polity with common religious and martial attributes, the provincial gazetteers published throughout the 1880s told a different story. Concerned as they were with recording in painstaking detail the practice of custom and ritual, particularly those relating to social status and marriage,

these gazetteers focused a great deal of attention on the idea of 'Maratha' as a marker of social/jati status. All of them also recorded the flexibility of the distinction between Marathas and Kunbis. The Kolhapur volume recorded that 'the martial classes among the Marathi-speaking middle classes called themselves Marathas. Some families have perhaps an unusually large strain of Northern or Rajput blood, but as a class Marathas cannot be distinguished from Marathi-speaking Deccan Kunbis, with whom all eat and the poorer intermarry.'[54] Other volumes for the districts of Poona, Satara, Ratnagiri, Berar, and Nagpur also recorded the eagerness with which Kunbi families were taking to the sacred thread, and the connection that some families had with Rajput and Kshatriya ancestry.

As a result of field surveys and research, the analysis that the gazetteers summed up about the Marathas was shaped by the changing patterns of ritual and status claim that were taking place in the late nineteenth century. In these writings, Maratha emerged not as a term to be stretched to the entire Marathi-speaking population, but the marker of a specific caste group. When the new edition of the *Imperial Gazetteer* was published in 1908, it abandoned its earlier 'national' description of the Marathas and wrote that 'of the total population of the Deccan districts, thirty percent are Marathas, between whom intermarriage is permissible.'[55]

This tension between the historical antecedents of the Marathas as a polity or a tribe and their contemporary avatar as a caste group remained a central feature of colonial sociological writings well into the twentieth century. This debate was influenced not only by the need to identify large numerical majorities in different regions for administrative reasons, but also by the larger ethnological debate on the Aryan racial presence in the subcontinent and its expression in different caste groups. H.H. Risley, the leading proponent of the racial view of caste origin, was convinced, on the basis of anthropometric measurements of people from the Deccan, that the Marathas were of Scythian origin. To him, 'The physical type of the people of this region accord . . . well with this theory [of Scythian origin] while the

arguments derived from language and religion do not seem to conflict with it . . . on this view the wide-ranging forays of the Marathas, their guerilla methods of warfare, their unscrupulous dealings with friend and foe, their genius for intrigue and their consequent failure to build up an enduring dominion, might well be regarded as inherited from their Scythian ancestors.'[56] In commenting on the 'character' of the Marathas, however, Risley was not referring to the Marathas as a caste; he was referring to the Marathi-speaking population as a whole.

R.E. Enthoven, the Superintendent of Ethnography for the Bombay presidency and the author of *Tribes and Castes of Bombay,* disagreed strongly with Risley's conclusion, on the grounds that it clashed strongly with contemporary evidence of social hierarchy prevailing in the Deccan. The fact that a Chitpavan Brahman and a member of the untouchable Mahar caste could have the same cephalic index measurements was to Enthoven 'at least disconcerting' and he added that 'the Mahar would not be expected in such strange company'.[57] To Enthoven, the Marathas were possibly the descendants of an aboriginal tribe, which might then have mingled with some influence from the north. He wrote at length about the village guardian deities or *devaks* that were important to the Maratha caste rituals, concluding that these totems were evidence of a 'pre-Aryan element in the Marathas'. Kunbi itself, he argued, was an occupational term, and derived from the Sanskrit word for husbandman, *kutumbika.* As such, then, Marathas and Kunbis could not exactly be termed a tribe, but a group with mixed origins that developed into a caste. In explaining this development, Enthoven turned to history.

> There is probably no substantial difference in origin between the landholding and warrior section, i.e. Marathas Proper, the cultivators, i.e. Maratha Kunbis and the numerous local occupational castes. . . . the rise of the Maratha power in the 17th century induced the fighting classes . . . to claim for themselves Kshatriya rank and to discourage widow remarriage. It is chiefly on this ground that they claim to be superior to the Kunbis. But by descent the Maratha

appears to be one with the Maratha Kunbis and certain other occupational castes in the Deccan.[58]

R.V. Russell, who supervised the compilation of the *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces,* also wrote at length about the Marathas' origins. According to him, the present incarnations of caste groups in Indian society were the result of its organisation into village communities. This was definitely the case with the Kunbis, who as a tribe might have settled in fresh areas and slowly developed into a caste.[59] As for the Marathas, they were a caste 'of purely military origin constituted from the various castes of Maharashtra who adopted military service [under Shivaji], although some of the leading families may have had Rajputs for their ancestors.'[60]

Various census reports published from the 1890s to the 1930s also grappled with the question of the Marathas' origins. *The Central Provinces Census Report* for 1891, expressing a great deal of frustration at the lack of any uniformity in answers to questions about caste groupings, finally decided to get rid of local divisions and classed the Marathas as a whole as a 'military tribe' under the section of Dominant Agricultural and Military castes.[61] The Bombay Census of 1901 referred to the Marathas as the 'descendants of Shivaji's warriors', a tribe who were then 'split asunder by virtue of social inequalities.'[62] It classed them as a caste of a 'national' type, on the basis of their having a lower degree of racial purity than tribal castes; their racial admixture was of a comparatively recent origin and the basis for their unity political and not racial.[63] Census reports for both these provinces followed the occupational classification of caste laid out by leading ethnographers such as John Nesfield and William Crooke as opposed to the racial formula of Herbert Risley. Racial origins, however, continued to haunt census officials and their approach to caste, as suggested by a comment in the Central Provinces Census Report of 1931: 'Caste is so mixed up with race that for ethnological purposes a continuous record is essential. To treat in a single class the Maratha Brahman and the Maria

of Chanda, the Rajput and the Sanor of Saugor . . . or the Bairagi and Chamar of Chhatisgarh would be openly to flout science.'[64]

The confusion among colonial ethnographers about the exact nature of 'Maratha' was clearly linked to the ongoing processes of status claims within rural society since the mid-nineteenth century. The claims of many Maratha families to Kshatriya and Rajput status brought to the fore the issue of so-called Aryan origins, which ethnographers like Enthoven and Russell, arguing from the perspective of village communities, totem deities and the like, were not willing to endorse. The appearance of pamphlets claiming to provide proof of these Rajput and Kshatriya origins through Puranic origin myths, surname lists and so on in the early twentieth century—K.B. Deshmukh's works discussed above are an excellent example—force ethnographers to take note of these claims and their possible veracity. Enthoven gave considerable space to these narratives in his work, trying in vain to analyse them scientifically and logically. Despite his insistence on the non-Aryan origins of the caste group, he finally concluded that at present 54 Maratha families (whose names he provided) could logically be said to have legitimate Kshatriya and Rajput ancestry![65]

Colonial sociological materials, thus, differed widely over the meaning of 'Maratha', with extensive debate about its classification and nature as a tribe rooted in history or a caste group characterized by common practice. In both cases, it is necessary to reiterate, broader intellectual influences of race and ethnology were important in shaping colonial lines of enquiry, but the debates and practices officials encountered on the ground, as it were, within Maharashtrian society, considerably muddled the end result of their investigations. On the one hand, the consistent invocation of Shivaji and his history in writings about the Marathas, particularly at the height of the non-Brahman movement, made it impossible to ignore a sense of tribal—or racial—unity that fit in neatly with the late nineteenth-century understanding of political entities in racialised terms. On the other hand, changing ritual practices within Maratha-Kunbi groups, the foregrounding of Brahman exploitation in non-Brahman discourse and the

communitarian debates over who really belonged in the category Maratha made it imperative to take note of it in caste terms, in addition to the classificatory value that caste itself had gained in the process of 'knowing' Indian society.

Maharashtrian writers, both Brahman and non-Brahman, also creatively refashioned colonial points of view in putting forward their own social and political claims.[66] The pioneering nationalist historian V.K. Rajwade's writings are a good example of Brahman statements of social leadership couched in scientific, historicist language.[67] Rajwade was clearly influenced, like many others of his generation, by the ongoing debates over caste and race in colonial ethnography and used the broad framework of Aryan settlement from the north into the Deccan to discuss the ancient social history of Maharashtra.[68] His application of the theory, however, posited the Brahmans as the only true preservers of the Aryan tradition. The Marathas appeared as the mixed products of contacts between inferior Kshatriya peoples who had tired of Buddhist ideas in the Gangetic plain and settled further south, and the aboriginal Naga peoples of the Deccan. These people were, he wrote, 'totally dependent on the priesthood', incapable of government and were conquered successively by various Kshatriya peoples of the north: the Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Yadavas, etc. Some of these Kshatriya influences permeated into a few elite families, among them Shivaji's Bhosale lineage, but the bulk of the Maratha people remained quite uncultured. 'With no proper deities, no definite religion, no alphabet or sense of history, these people were responsible for the downfall of kings and the godly Brahmans.'[69] Grant Duff had concluded that the lack of any architectural achievements by the Marathas was testimony to their cultural weakness as a nation. Rajwade, otherwise bitterly critical of Duff, used precisely this argument to criticize the Marathas, but as a caste. Underlying this criticism, of course, was his own agenda of refuting non-Brahman claims to being the genuine shapers and inheritors of Maharashtra's history and culture.

In refuting arguments such as those of Rajwade, non-Brahman writings also used sections of colonial discourses in putting forward

their own interpretations of Maratha history of the Maratha caste group. Jotirao Phule's skilful use of the Aryan race debates to delegitimise Brahman leadership over Hindu society by depicting them as outsiders oppressing aboriginal peoples is well known. Other polemicists such as K.S. 'Prabodhankar' Thackeray, also a severe critic of James Grant Duff, nevertheless selectively borrowed from his *History of the Mahrattas* to highlight the picture of Brahmans as crafty and untrustworthy.[70] Wasudeo Lingoji Birze, librarian to the prince of Baroda and author of two popular books called *Who are the Marathas?* and *The Life of Kshatriyas* leaned heavily on Grant Duff, James Tod and Harry Acworth, the compiler of Marathi ballads, to bolster his claim of an ancient, upper-caste Kshatriya genealogy for the Marathas and to contest Brahman arguments that no Kshatriyas remained in the Kaliyuga or the present time.[71]

Non-Brahman campaigners encouraged prosperous peasants to drop the Kunbi tag during local elections as well, as the case of the prosperous Tirole Kunbis-turned-Marathas of Khandesh demonstrates.[72] There were also concerted efforts to influence the production of colonial discourse on the Marathas through campaigning before census operations. Many Maratha organizations within the non-Brahman movement attempted, through conferences and articles in various newspapers just before the census surveys in 1921 and 1931, to persuade the broader Kunbi population to return itself not as Kunbi but only as Maratha:

> All literate Maratha people know that in the census times many illiterate villagers call their caste 'kulvadi' or 'kunbi' rather than 'Maratha'. Except for Leva Kunbis in Khandesh, all those who call themselves 'Kunbis' or 'kulvadis' in Maharashtra, Konkan, Berar etc. are of 'Maratha' caste. Only out of ignorance do people not call themselves 'Marathas'. Educated Marathas should clearly inform any ignorant Maratha . . . The days of the rule of wealth have gone and the day of the rule of numbers has come: we hope our educated Maratha society will remember this.[73]

A couple of the census officers also remarked on the urgency of these attempts, which, it appears, did pay off. The numbers of Kunbis all across the Marathi-speaking areas dropped significantly in the 1921 and 1931 censuses, with notable increases in the number of people who now called themselves simply 'Maratha'.[74]

Two important policies of the colonial state served to further consolidate the attempts of the elite non-Brahman sections to claim 'Maratha' as the marker of an upper-caste Kshatriya status. The first was the creation of political categories of representation through the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms put in place in 1921. Non-Brahman leaders demanded separate electorates for a series of non-Brahman castes, but instead, the reforms granted seven reserved seats for a single category termed 'Marathas and Allied Castes'. Although O'Hanlon has pointed out that this umbrella category served as an official recognition of the common non-Brahman cause and the terminology *Marathe ani Itar* (Marathas and Others) that activists themselves applied, it is important to note that this official category also highlighted, simultaneously, the very real and perceived differences that existed between non-Brahman castes and the growing dominance of Marathas and Maratha-Kunbis within the non-Brahman castes and the growing dominance of Marathas and Maratha-Kunbis within the non-Brahman fold.[75] Official comments on this dominance in progress reports on the reforms were matched by protests from representatives of the Allied castes' throughout the 1930s against Maratha control of these piecemeal constitutional and electoral benefits allotted by the colonial government.[76]

The second important colonial policy was the delineation of 'Maratha' for purposes of recruitment into the army. The Maratha military past was clearly important in the identification of the Marathas as a 'martial race', and the reiteration of the martial overtones of this history in colonial sociological materials about the Marathas as a caste no doubt played a crucial role in earmarking them as fit for recruitment. Constable also points out that the Eden Commission's emphasis on localised recruitment, combined with the move towards

greater social homogenization of companies and battalions, increased the Bombay Army's reliance on local Marathas from the 1880s, but was matched by the growing dissatisfaction with the fighting qualities of these recruits and doubts about their true martial attributes.[77] It is perhaps for this reason that the 1908 recruitment handbook issued by the army insisted on restricting recruitment only to 'genuine Marathas' and painstakingly detailed the 'pure' groups, the ones 'attempting to pass', and the means to detect any such 'deceit'.[78] The book also provided a list of 96 family names as a reliable guide to determine whether the person was a genuine Maratha. It highlighted that, keeping their high-caste Hindu status in mind, they would also have the benefits of cooks and water-carriers available to them.

> A recruit on enlistment is asked his caste by the recruiter and again by the Recruiting Staff Officer. In the Konkan, a recruit when asked if he is Maratha will say 'yes'. He should then be asked whether he is a 'Rao' or a 'Naik'. If he says he is neither or tries to explain what he is, it may be assumed he is not a pure Maratha and he should be rejected. In the Dekhan, a man may say he is a Kunbi, a Maratha or both; he can be accepted. Those who claim to be only Marathas and not Kunbis are probably of better birth. If a man tries to explain he is neither by some other class of Maratha, he is not a Maratha at all and should be rejected.[79]

Maratha recruitment was stepped up after World War I, after a series of commendable performances by the Maratha Light Infantry coincided with non-Brahman efforts to step up the recruitment of young non-Brahman men into government jobs, political office and the army. The favourite grounds for recruitment were the strongholds of elite Maratha power, Satara and Kolhapur. The handbook's guidelines testified to the elasticity of the category but attempted to fix it as a narrow upper caste; actual recruitment practice once again, therefore, served the interests of elite Marathas and upwardly-mobile Maratha-Kunbis. Throughout the early twentieth century, various Maratha associations and non-Brahman newspapers enthusiastically promoted the attractions of the

army, but according to Constable, Maratha military officers also showed an increased intolerance towards lower-caste and Dalit recruits in their ranks.[80] The All India Maratha Conference's statement, published in the *Jagruti* issue of 1 March 1919, was directed as much at the Maratha community as to the colonial government: 'The Conference of course expresses its loyal support [to the government] and expresses delight about the victory in the recent war. In battlefields across the world, brave Maratha heroes displayed their dazzling Kshatriya qualities in this war. Along with this report, therefore, we put forward a request that the Marathas be allowed to play a greater role in the army and display their military qualities, and that some educational institutions, especially a college be established to allow them to further develop these qualities.'[81]

Constable has argued that the colonial martial race ideology and its insistence on a high-caste Maratha pedigree for recruitment was 'less a hegemonic colonial strategy invented by the British colonial establishment for British social and military control of India, than colonial "accommodation" for strategic purposes of higher-caste Maratha claims to social exclusivity as kshatriyas.'[82] Indeed, we do witness here the impact of non-Brahman debates over 'Maratha' on colonial ethnography and policy in general, but we also see the need for colonial discourse to develop a fixed formula that would transcend these bewildering claims. Moreover, the colonial state's search for, and ability to fix, such formulas regarding caste as structures of recruitment and representation were instrumental in deciding which claims were consolidated and which ones lost out. In identifying the Maratha as a high-caste Kshatriya category different from other rural caste groups, the army recruitment policy as well as the reserved seats category 'Maratha and others' ended up consolidating the elite and exclusivist strand within non-Brahman discourse. By the 1930, the radical, inclusive interpretations that had made 'Maratha' a new vision of community and a site for articulating a more popular alternative to Brahman nationalism had all but dissipated. In the formal political arena as well as in the public sphere, the idea that the Marathas were

upper-caste Hindus, a Kshatriya caste group with a glorious military tradition, became dominant. Those who benefited the most from the crystallization of this view in the formal political apparatus were rural elites best placed to successfully establish this pedigree.

In the 1930s, younger non-Brahmans, increasingly unhappy with the non-Brahman party's loyalism and influenced by socialist ideas, established links with Gandhian Congressmen and entered nationalist politics.[83] Jedhe's efforts in particular led Congress membership to soar from 45,913 members in 1936 to 156,894 the next year.[84] Rural participation was certainly higher during the Civil Disobedience and Quit India movements than in the non-cooperation struggles of the 1920s; official daily and weekly reports from across Maharashtra suggest that this move of non-Brahmans towards nationalism was certainly crucial to the Congress' success in rural mobilization.[85] The Congress tapped into the rural networks built by the non-Brahman movement in the 1920s: following Jedhe's move, to cite just one example, the party was able to capture an unprecedented 10 out of 11 district local boards in Bombay in 1935.[86]

Y.B. Chavan records in his memoirs that the Congress' entry into these institutions through the nomination and election of non-Brahman Congressmen was crucial to the party's rural base; importantly, it paved the way for rural Maratha leaders to gradually displace older, Brahman Congressmen.[87] The non-Brahman movement, despite all its caste and economic differentiation, had always shown greater inclination towards voicing rural issues and grievances than the urban Brahman Congress; its pro-peasant rhetoric in this mass phase went a long way in giving the Congress party itself a rural face, and the Marathas an edge in the new nationalist politics. It was this new nationalist rural Maratha leadership and its networks built through non-Brahman activism that spearheaded the parallel government of Satara during the 1942 Quit India movement. The movement thrived on underground networks and overwhelming popular support from the local peasantry, with one of the largest concentration of Marathas.[88] It

also propelled younger Maratha leaders such as Nana Patil and Chavan himself, with their experience of grassroots political activity, into prominence in the Congress Party in the 1940s; this experience and contact with rural networks was crucial to the Maratha predominance in electoral politics following independence.

Conclusions

In her analysis of the use of 'Maratha' by non-Brahman activists in the 1890s, Rosalind O'Hanlon has rightly remarked that this ambiguity over the category's content and meaning was a source of both strength and weakness. While it allowed non-Brahmans to exclusively claim the regional history and heritage of pride and struggle of the precolonial past and delegitimise Brahman claims to social leadership, its elite inflections made it difficult for *all* non-Brahman groups to lay equal claim to it.[89] Activists in the twentieth century such as Mukundrao Patil struggled to keep alive this radical edge to the category by using it to refer to all non-Brahman caste groups in their rhetoric, but with increasing difficulty. The Kshatriya claims within non-Brahman discourse together with the growing dominance of Maratha-Kunbis within the movement and in rural networks of power ensured that the radical possibilities the category had been invested with during the late nineteenth century lost out to exclusivist, upper-caste claims. Finally, the imperatives of colonial ethnography and its crystallization in policies of enumeration and representation consolidated this emerging elite 'Maratha' dominance over rural society.

I have attempted in this article to track one example of the multiple ways in which social categories were formulated and debated in the colonial period. This overview of the discourses and policies surrounding the definition of the category 'Maratha' emphasises the importance of keeping regional histories and contexts in play when plotting the modern history of caste and caste identity. Recent scholarship on caste has been invaluable in historicizing caste, but has resulted in a rather polarised debate over the degree of blame to be attached to colonialism for the central role that caste occupies in Indian

social and political life today. An analysis of colonial discourse and official policy regarding 'Maratha' indicates that colonial sociology was not homogeneous, and that colonial attempts to understand the 'Maratha' category in all its sociological, political and historical implications had a much more complex relationship with the ongoing debates within Maharashtrian society, with both spheres influencing and significantly borrowing from each other. To both colonial observers as well as Maharashtrian writers, the specific precolonial history of Maharashtra, be it Shivaji's military adventures or the Peshwai's rigid Brahmanical strictures, played a crucial role in determining how the Marathas were to be understood, organized and represented: this underscores the importance of viewing these debates and policies in their appropriate regional setting.

Recognising this two-way borrowing between colonial and Indian discourses is not to reduce the colonial state's tremendous power in setting the terms of the debate or in influencing the larger political and social environment within which Indian writers and activists themselves functioned. Indeed, as we have seen, colonial policies regarding electoral categories and military recruitment played a crucial role in consolidating changes taking place within non-Brahman discourse. Instead, it is to highlight the complex interactive process through which caste categories were constructed, the selective and skilful use of colonial discourses by different groups of Indians to advance different social and political claims, the many ways in which these claims themselves influenced colonial categories of representation, and the need to consider regional particularities in locating this agency.

9

Feminine, Criminal, or Manly? Imaging Dalit Masculinities in Colonial North India*

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Studies on masculinity in India have come into their own, particularly in the past decade.[1] The study of men is as vital for gender analysis as that of the ruling classes for class analysis.[2] However, masculinity frequently denies men's identity because of its centrality in patriarchal formations. The propertied, high-caste, heterosexual Hindu male is at the top of religious and caste hierarchies. Significant works have revealed how the male body was constructed in colonial discourse, contrasting the manly British with the effeminate colonial subject.[3] And in present-day India, links have been made between the growth of the Hindu Right, assertions of masculinity, and violence.[4]

However, most historical studies have focused primarily on colonial or upper-caste Hindu masculinity and not examined how this appeared in the creation of Dalit identity.[5] While religious identities have remained an important arena for masculinity studies, the same cannot be said with equal certainty about caste. In other words, the relationship between caste, Dalit identities, sexual ideology, and masculinity has not been easily recognized, particularly in the context of colonial India.

Examining Dalit masculinity complicates rigid links between masculinity, domination, and power. Dalit masculine subjectivity remained ambiguous in relation to Hindu upper-caste masculine hegemony in colonial India. Claiming manhood, for example, could become a way to articulate dignity and social status and to extend the rights of Dalits. These images contested, creatively appropriated, and reinterpreted various ideals of masculinity. The ideas and social practices that constituted hegemonic masculinity were accepted, rejected, and enacted in contradictory and ambiguous ways by Dalit men. This paper places Dalit masculinity at its centre, rather than relegating it to the margins of masculinity studies, in the process messing its current trajectory. It explores ways in which the Dalit male body was socially constructed, or denied, by colonial authorities, by upper castes, and by Dalits themselves, both for social control and for identity construction, in colonial north India, with a particular focus on what is now Uttar Pradesh (UP).

'Untouchables' in Colonial UP

Scholars have shown how colonial rule accelerated two seemingly contradictory processes: the 'secularization' of caste *and* its novel association with Hindu religion through urbanization, municipal laws, the courts, orientalist perceptions, missionary activities, and the decennial census.[6] Though Dalits were employed to an extent in the colonial economy, there was a simultaneous consolidation of the 'pollution barrier' which divided clean and unclean castes. There also appeared a tight connection between religious, caste, and political assertion amongst the Dalits in colonial India.[7] For the Dalits of UP colonial rule signalled a mixture of advantages and privations, whereby they gained and lost in a variety of conflicting ways.[8] Proselytizing by Christian missionaries led to the considerable dissemination of vernacular tracts in UP as propaganda for conversions.[9] The North Indian Christian Tract and Book Society, with its headquarters at Allahabad,[10] published painted story scrolls, pamphlets, books and hymns, addressing itself largely to the depressed classes.[11] Many

Chamars and Bhangis (sweepers) of Badaun, Mathura, Meerut, Roorkee, Kanpur, Moradabad, Pilibhit, Bijnor, and Bareilly converted to Christianity.[12]

Simultaneously, in rural eastern UP a group of landholders appeared in the nineteenth century, who had a greater interest in defence of hierarchies.[13] Patron—client linkages, the *jajmani* system (a system of quasi service, in which occupations and castes are linked to each other), and *begar* (unpaid labour) acquired new salience.[14] Central and eastern districts and Bundelkhand, densely populated regions, suffered from extreme poverty and heavy pressure on agricultural land.[15] The region saw the growth of sugarcane cultivation, which profited zamindars (landlords) but offered no economic opportunities for Dalits,[16] 80 per cent of whom were agricultural peasants and labourers.[17] Many Dalits were also in debt bondage and *harwahas* (agricultural labourers and ploughmen) for generations, receiving extremely low wages.[18] In regions like Awadh, debts remained high. There were further economic dislocations due to growing land hunger, agrarian depression, natural disasters, the progressive sub-divisions of landholdings, and the decline of cottage industries.[19] Many Dalits found their means of livelihood in jeopardy.[20]

This led many Dalits to migrate to cities, which they saw as places which provided greater opportunities. After 1857 there was rapid expansion of communication, market production, law courts, education, libraries, and print in the towns of UP.[21] The urban economy saw considerable industrial expansion. Between 1922 and 1927 alone, regulated factories in UP increased by 40 per cent and factory workers by 25 per cent.[22] But urban spaces, too, were segregated along caste lines. Dalit men were confined to the worst jobs, the dirtiest work in industry, and relegated to the most squalid neighbourhoods. Urban contexts often reinforced the values of caste Hindu society and institutionalized Brahmanical prescriptions by incorporating Dalits almost exclusively into occupations considered polluting to Hindus. At

the same time, urbanization and limited capitalism had certain advantages for Dalits. They provided anonymity, which made it difficult to enforce caste restrictions. This led to some loosening of traditional caste ties, the forging of new alliances, and occupational mobility. New jobs were created, with Dalits working as carters and porters in railways, as domestic servants and retainers for the British, as peons in offices, as municipal sweepers and scavengers.[23] There were also some opportunities for Dalits to acquire fortunes in trades which caste Hindus were loath to touch. There were examples of acquisition of wealth by some Chamars, Doms, Telis, and Kalwars through the development of leather, oil-seed, liquor, and metal businesses. Some Chamars took to the profitable trades of shoemakers and saddlers,[24] trading in raw hides and skins as legitimate entrepreneurs.[25] They also found new outlets in large tanneries, especially around Kanpur and Aligarh, with relatively higher wages.[26] In Agra, some families of the Chamar caste came to be accepted as creditworthy merchants.[27]

A section of Dalits saw modern developments and institutions like schools and colleges, print and publishing, public and political bodies, courts, and railways as spaces for greater social, political, and economic mobility.[28] There emerged a small educated Dalit elite in UP as a result of limited openings in education. A certain increase in opportunities and print offered the chance to forge new organizations.[29] From the 1890s there was a proliferation of Dalit caste associations in UP, with their own movements, publications, journals, and temples. They initiated changes in their religious and social practices as ways of asserting alternative visions for their community.[30] Urbanization enabled formerly submerged Dalit subpopulations to emerge, and made manifest a pre-existing Dalit heterogeneity concerning gender, sexuality, class, and immigrant status. As part of a vernacular reading public, Dalit caste spokespersons emerged,[31] and made some of the most forceful claims to higher status, and an assertion of their 'rights'. Print journalism helped nurture a Dalit counter-public sphere and create a new sense of Dalit identity articulated by Dalit reformers and

publicists. These Dalit publicists re-evaluated caste histories and their genealogies. They made powerful critiques of Brahmanical domination and caste hierarchies. Dalit leaders like Achutanand drew up a distinct Adi Hindu movement which not only made claims for social and political rights, but also forcefully argued that Dalits were the original inhabitants of India.[32] They also made several petitions to the government, arguing for preferential treatment and a share in public appointments and political representations.[33] Thus, for some Dalits colonial modernity was perceived as providing a limited sense of liberation.

In the same period, reformist and revivalist rhetoric in UP reached new heights. Movements like the Arya Samaj, while upholding caste hierarchies, were also making limited indigenous critiques of caste rigidities, linking them to modernity, civilization, and nation-building.[34] In Arya Samaj's renderings,[35] the downtrodden had a definite place in the reconstituted Vedic past: because their degraded lifestyles were a consequence of forgetting their Aryan identity, they could be redeemed through *shuddhi* (purification). At least on a theoretical level, they proposed that the 'depressed classes' be allowed certain liberties.[36] Such developments, combined with increasing assertions by Dalits, made many among the upper castes feel that their caste superiority was waning.[37] Many of their publications portrayed a bleak mental landscape of Kaliyug, modern times where none of the castes were conforming to prescribed behaviour.[38] Brahmins, instead of praying, were becoming lazy; Kshatriyas, instead of being brave, were becoming sexually debased; and the lower castes had abandoned their obligation to serve and were asserting their rights, forgetting their place in caste hierarchies and society.[39]

This is the background for this paper. The ways in which Dalit masculinity was constructed or dismantled by the upper castes revealed social relationships at particular historical moments, and showed how these could be inscribed onto the actual human bodies available. I first examine Dalit masculinity through its representations within the

dominant culture in colonial UP, at the hands of actors such as Arya Samajists, missionaries, and the British. Second, I attempt to understand assertions of Dalit masculinity by Dalits themselves, reading Dalit histories, and the crisis of Dalit manhood, through a gendered lens.

Dilemmas in Colonial and Upper-Caste Narratives

In colonial India, manhood emerged as a national preoccupation. Colonialism justified itself through masculine images and nationalism worked its own versions of this, raising individual concerns to collective anxieties over the meanings of masculinity and femininity. Masculinity was expressed in different ways: from Vivekananda to Gandhi, from Sanatan Dharmists to Arya Samajists, from notions of *brahmacharya* (celibacy) to the images of a warrior Krishna.[40] Most of such cultural constructions erased the Dalit male body from the national imagination. National manhood was overwhelmingly constructed as a Hindu upper-caste story. However, Dalits could not escape the projection of other versions. The Hindu upper-caste and colonial male gaze froze Dalit bodies into accepted rigid forms, embedded in existing hierarchical power relations. Their narratives often converged in their portrayal of Dalit men and their masculinity. They upheld contradictory images of Dalit men, which varied according to the context in which they appeared. On the one hand, they were often portrayed as meek and docile, strong but stupid, ready to serve their masters. On the other, there was an equally strong projection of them as criminals, violent, threatening. Both these images were enframed and confined to narrow representational fields, and fed into each other, their invocation depending on the ideological contextual requirement. These constructions made the Dalit male subject publicly visible; at the same time they reproduced certain stereotypes of Dalit male otherness.

Scholars have shown how the Indian male was constructed by the British as weak and lacking in manliness.[41] This was further magnified in the construction of the Dalit male. His body reflected the abject body of labour. The imagery of him as meek and stupid served a particular

purpose. Since Dalit men did hard manual labour, justification for the harsh conditions forced upon them required a representation of their bodies as resilient and them as dim-witted. This image of them as chattel reinforced their domestic subservience status. Dalit men were stereotyped as childlike, inferior, and unfree. The Chamar male, for example, was often seen as docile, both in colonial and upper-caste literature, ready to do hard work. The Dalit male body was infantalized, tamed, and trained for practical use. Dalits were considered a form of agricultural machinery and valued primarily for their hard work, endurance, and productive capability. They were beasts of burden and workhorses. Their bodies were to be used in the fields from sun-up to sundown. Numerous narratives attested to their passivity in servitude. In several gazetteers of UP it was repeatedly emphasized that Chamars were good and industrious cultivators but habitually inclined to desert their holdings at the slight pretext.[42] Settlement reports stated that Chamars were both hardworking and submissive.[43]

Many Dalits had entered the households of landlords as domestic servants. These men were stripped of their supposed predilection for unrestrained sexuality and violence and their masculinity was unmade. They were rendered powerless in relation to their own selves, reinforcing their servile status. They were serfs and servants whose behaviour fitted them to serve the upper castes. They dared not oppose those in power or challenge authority in the courts. To justify their exploitation, high-caste men and the colonial authorities created an image of the Dalit male as subservient. He was an embodiment of the asexual, safe, assimilated, and subordinated man, who, for all this, was capable of hard physical labour. The benevolence bestowed on Dalit men by their masters was seen as preferable to their exposure to the 'tyrannies of freedom' in the towns. The village was romanticized as a place where there was much harmony, where upper castes behaved with lower castes according to their *maryada* (customary boundaries), and where Chamar and Pasi men were also addressed respectfully.[44] *Seva* (to serve) had a much higher status in this version of the world than *naukri* (employment). An article titled 'Hindu Bhangi', published in the

leading Hindi journal *Chand* stated: 'Bhangi (sweeper) means to serve . . . If the sweepers refuse to clean then who will protect the grandeur of the rich and the veil of the high caste women? . . . Their homes are kept outside the villages and cities so that they can get adequate rest and their health remains fine . . . The sweepers are not our *naukars* (servants) but our *sevaks* (attendants) . . . Those who work for salaries in government municipalities are to be criticised as their real job is to do service without greed.'[45]

The Dalit male's intellectual capacities too were referred to as inferior and childlike, playing on a mind/body separation.[46] He was seen as inferior in intellect, slow in understanding, and altogether dumb. A functioning brain was therefore denied him, relegating him to being all body. An isomorphism was visible here, as the binaries between men/women were reflected in the relationship between uppercaste and Dalit men: intellect/body, active/passive, reason/emotion, order/disorder. Even the Arya Samaj often succumbed to this rhetoric. In an article in *Sudha,* Gangaprasad Upadhyaya, a leading figure of Arya Samaj in UP, stated: 'The *achchuts* [untouchables] cannot do any work themselves; they can only obey the orders of others. If they are with a student, they can upkeep his books; if they are with a soldier, they can dust and clean his sword; if they are with a trader, they can sweep his shop. These men have been referred to as our feet. We must remember that they are not unnecessary. But they cannot do any original work. They can just follow others.'[47]

It was further argued that Dalit labour fostered the same love between the landlord and the Dalit as marriage did between husband and wife. The unequal status and lack of competition between the Dalit and his master became a definition to promote love. A reformist tract stated: 'We need to be protective towards our *achchut* younger brothers. Just as a husband takes care of his wife and bestows love on her, while also keeping a watch on her movement, we too need to look after *achchuts* and see to it that they are not swayed by any outside influence. For a harmonious society, it is imperative to have such a balance.'[48] Even sympathetic accounts of Dalit men were often cast in the same

language. There was a romantic casteism here, where the affectionate nature of Dalit men was stressed. An Arya Samaj tract observed: 'If we look deeply into the hearts of our *achchut* brother who works around us, we will find a village simpleton, who bestows care on us unconditionally. He addresses us as *seth-sahib, babu-sahib* and *mai-baap*. In return he demands nothing from us except some love.'[49]

These views were endorsed by many. Annie Besant summed it up: 'They [the 'depressed classes'] are gentle, docile, as a rule industrious, pathetically submissive, merry enough when not in actual want, with a bright though generally very limited intelligence; of truth and the civic virtues they are for the most part utterly devoid . . . but they are affectionate, grateful for the slightest kindness, and with much "natural religion"'.[50] Literature in support of and against religious conversions by missionaries and reformers strengthened such imagery. Missionary records repeatedly talked of the simple heart of the depressed classes: 'They make splendid Christians. They have great faith, and many of them a *child-like trust and simplicity in worship* that puts an occidental to shame.'[51] A missionary pamphlet published from Allahabad stated: 'The depressed classes are governed by their heart rather than their mind. They are not cunning like many of the upper caste Hindus, who have exploited these simple men in a clever fashion. It is much easier to win them over and mould them according to the true teachings of Christian faith.'[52]

Hindu reformers depicted Dalits as incapable of taking decisions to convert on their own, and saw them as being manipulated by the maulvi and the missionary. Cartoons on the subject, in leading magazines of UP, portrayed the Dalit male body as feeble, small in stature, and lacking a mind. One caricatured him as a 'football', being kicked by a pandit, but being grabbed by the maulvi and the padre. Another showed him as 'unclaimed property'. In both, the Dalit was denied any voice in the matter. Other visual images reinforced the imagery of the meek Dalit body, usually portraying it as dark, set against a white background and an upper-caste, white, well-built body to emphasize visual contrast.[53] These images constructed the cultural

meanings of the Dalit body, and symbolized the aesthetic, cultural, and social values of reformers. They indicated what was sanctioned, often repeatedly, in print. Even benevolent Dalit rhetoric used symbols of submission where Dalit men appeared as semi-nude, kneeling, and servile. The everyday visual depictions of Dalit men in public spaces showed them in a restricted context which kept them in 'their place'.

Colonial perceptions strengthened these stereotypes. Dalit men were often described as dirty, short, and ugly. Thus wrote Crooke, 'Bhangis have a dark complexion, stunted figure, and peculiar dark flashing eyes.'[54] Sherring remarked on the Doms: 'Dark complexioned, low of stature, and somewhat repulsive in appearance, they are readily distinguished from all the better castes of Hindus.'[55] The missionary literature could not escape such classifications either:

> *Arya jati ke log lambe chaure sundar sudaul aur sabhya hote hain. neech jati ke log kurup kudaul nate kad ke aur asabhya hote hain*
>
> (Aryans are tall, broad, beautiful, well built and civilized. Lower-caste people are ugly, weak, short, wild, and uncivilized).[56]

The language used was not a simple reflection of human physiology or customs; it reinforced the assumption that their supposed physical attributes were also an expression of their moral qualities. In the process, these writers were exhibiting a highly charged, but socially approved, convention.

However, rather than some single fixed identity, a repertoire of images represented Dalit bodies as also lecherous, criminal, violent, threatening, and uncontainable.[57] These socially sanctioned pejoratives were linguistic short-hands in a jumble of casteist and racial semiotics which became particularly potent whenever Dalits started to assert their rights. They conveyed a negation of the distinct identity of certain groups of outcaste communities by showing them as an aberration or an inferior part of a homogeneous Hindu identity. Scholars have shown how the British identified untouchables as having criminal attributes as a result of their genetic inheritance, and they assigned them to the

lowest position in the Hindu ritual hierarchy.[58] Many of these perceptions were shared by caste Hindus.[59]

Colonial practices drew upon Brahmanical frameworks and gave them a further stamp of authority by confirming these assumptions. Images of Dalit men were extended from abstract textual categories into foundational ones. In many British official documents and uppercaste perceptions, Dalit men, particularly Chamars, were associated with cattle theft.[60] It was widely believed that they had an economic motive for poisoning cattle, since they were regarded as chief tanners and shoemakers. Crooke confidently stated that in numerous cases Chamars had poisoned cattle for their hide and their flesh.[61] William Hoey, Commissioner of Gorakhpur, was convinced of the diabolical nature of Chamars because they poisoned cattle.[62] It has been argued that it was the colonial state that first put forward this dominant narrative in the second half of the nineteenth century, when it singled out the crime of cattle-poisoning not just as an occasional occurrence but as an 'organized and professional crime' associated with Chamars.[63] It was stated elsewhere that if any single community was addicted to crime more than another, it was the Bhangis.[64] The Pasis of Oudh were identified as criminal tribes under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 and constructed as hereditary robbers and thieves.[65] The Dusadhs were characterized as drunkards. The Doms of Gorakhpur were seen as having criminals characteristics, always at the threshold of a jail.[66] The lines between criminal and low castes were constantly blurred and the two were almost interchangeable. The British discovered a bewildering host of specimens classifiable as 'essential types'. These images became a part of Dalit men's social experience.

When some Dalits became active in anti-landlord movements in eastern UP in the 1920s, and in anti-*begari* agitations of the 1940s, they were seen as a threat because of their predilection for violence. During riots Dalits were often identified as a social menace. An officer from Kanpur said in 1900: 'The population of Cawnpore contains number of Chamars engaged in various tanneries and leather factories. They are

notoriously of a turbulent disposition and have been the most active participants in recent riots.'[67] Though Muslim men were portrayed as the most potent threat to upper-caste Hindu women,[68] sometimes Dalit men were portrayed in the same way because of anxieties over possible intimate liaisons. Public places were particularly 'dangerous' because outcaste and Muslim men ogled upper-caste women.[69] The threat of potent Dalit male sexuality also provided a basis for controlling upper-caste women under the guise of 'protection'. Various didactic manuals gave instructions to women to keep away from Dalit men. The tract *Striyon ko Chetavni* (Warning to Women) warned; 'Do not ever go in front of Dhobis (washermen), Chamars or Bhangis without *purdah* (veil). Do not eat anything offered by them or wear charms and amulets given by them. In public places, never talk to them.'[70] Another, meant for Vaishya women, said: 'Why do our women observe *purdah* from righteous men like husbands and father-in-laws? What they need is to observe strict *purdah* in front of the *neech kaum* [low caste] like the Dhobi, Chamar and Bhangi, who include bad characters . . .'[71] This was combined with a fear that some upper-caste widows might elope with or marry Muslim and lower- caste men. It was reported that two upper-caste widows ran away with a Dhobi and a Bhangi respectively. Both men, along with their wives, converted to Christianity.[72] The fear of losing their women to Muslim, Christian, or lower-caste men created grave anxieties among upper-caste men. The stereotype of the sexually potent Dalit male was also often associated with the promiscuous reputation of the Dalit woman. It was thought that to satisfy such hot-natured women the Dalit male had to be especially potent.[73] Dalit men were also seen as wife-beaters and drunkards, repeatedly unleashing violence against their women.[74] Upper-caste men usually used this imagery also to divert attention from their own patriarchal attitudes. Dalitness was seen as threatening, feral, bestial.

There were thus two broad trends in the construction of Dalit bodies. The desirous body was one that could be manipulated and measured by its utility. It displayed the qualities of an industrious, docile, and willing

servant. The worst were those who not only declined to serve, but dared to challenge upper-caste supremacy, symbolizing a reversal of established hierarchies.

We Too Are 'Men': Dalit Male Identities and Assertions of Manhood

However, Dalit men were not just a screen on which high-caste men and colonial authorities projected their caste, racial, and gender anxieties. They, too, were historical agents in their formulation of identity. They attempted to challenge the stereotypes by asserting their own masculinities in different ways, often implicitly, and by conceiving a gendered sense of self in political activities, cultural performances, and demands in social-public spheres—the implications of which were often contradictory and ambiguous. Through quotidian practices in spheres of work, war, leisure, and political organization they evolved ways to survive the self-alienating disjunction of caste, and to recuperate their manhood. Discrimination in cities made it difficult for Dalits to talk of masculinity through dominant social standards. However, migration and urbanization helped Dalits reconstitute manhood and make visible a variety of Dalit ways of being. Here I will briefly discuss some spaces in which Dalits attempted to refute subordinated Dalit masculinity by living their own versions of it in specific contexts, which sometimes led to a positive assertion of their social status and rights, and at other moments strengthened patriarchal formations and prevailing notions of masculinity.

In the cultural realm, for example, the myths and heroic traditions of Dalits provided not just models *of* reality but also models *for* reality. In colonial UP, the epic of Alhakhand was appropriated and chanted by some Dalit minstrels,[75] who reinterpreted it not as a tale of Rajput but of Dalit chivalry. They claimed Alha and Udal, the two brothers whose heroic deeds helped king Parmal in his war against Prithviraj in the twelfth century, as part of their own heroic traditions. In a number of versions, the epic referred to Dalit characters, like the Biria Malin, who carried messages to Alha under the pretext of fetching flowers, or

Dhunwa Teli, a leader of the Kannauj forces, a Mallah and a Korie.[76] They were celebrated and emphasised in the renderings of the epic by rural Dalits,[77] and by Agra Jatavs, who claimed Alha and Udal were untouchables. They were identified as symbols of courage fighting for justice. Alha and Pachra, sung particularly by Dusadhs, and *batohiya* songs rendered by Dalits in UP, came to centre on such tales. In the 1940s, Ambedkar became a part of Dalit performances of the epic in UP. He too was depicted as a great leader and hero who could take his place among the country's leaders with pride.[78] Through such stories, Dalits attempted to prove that untouchables were great warriors in heart, word, and deed. Myth and reality, and constructions of heroism and valour combined to provide a language of social rights. In such popular spaces a complex ideology of Dalit masculinity was played out, which was neither hetero-centric nor misogynist but developed out of a uniquely Dalit experience. They offered a critical recourse to another language in which different realities of Dalit masculine life were expressed.

Military modernity in the colonial period provided many castes of UP a possibility of 'manhood enhancement'. The idiom of martial valour found supporters amongst many, including, for example, the urban Sudra poor and the Yadavs, as it was an effective expedient of upward-class mobility.[79] Dalits too used this opportunity to articulate their distinctive military traditions and visions of manhood, in the process drawing from others, while simultaneously giving it their own colour.

The role and participation of Dalits in the British army and police has been a subject of debate. Dalit scholars and some historians have researched colonial army histories to show that Chamars, Dusadhs, Dhusias, Doms, Dhanuks, and Pasis played a critical part as soldiers in the British armies, especially during the battle of Plassey and in 1857.[80] It appears that when the English began to transform their economic power into military power, lower castes provided their first soldiers.[81] However, the recruitment of Dalits by the British proved fickle, and

there was a slow Brahmanization of the army.[82] As early as 1800, British commanders had been submitting applications for the dismissal of men whom they suspected of belonging to the 'objectionable' lower castes.[83] But some argued in favour of their recruitment. Their most vigorous defence came from a report submitted in 1860 by Lieutenant Bruce, Chief of the Oudh Police. In his police force there were 462 Bhungis, 252 Chamars, and 764 Pasis. Regarding Bhungis, he wrote: 'There are numerous divisions of the sweeper tribe but all make good soldiers. The men are of good height and fair muscular development, and they eat and drink anything with anybody; they are brave, aspire greatly to military service, and are fond of the practice of sword exercises in which many of them are expert, and are possessed of great shrewdness . . . There are nearly 500 of these men in the Police, and they have done good service both as Soldiers and Policemen.'[84] He was particularly full of praise for the Pasis:

> The Passees . . . are extremely hardy and courageous race, and furnish most of the village watchmen of Oude and the adjacent NWP, they use the bow and arrow expertly, and are said to be able to kill with the latter at wonderful distances; there used to be bodies of these men in the service of every Talookdar and Zemindar of Oude, the NWP too —I have no doubt before they came under our rule . . . Although there is hardly a species of theft, robbery and plunder in which they are not experienced and skilful, they have a remarkable name for fidelity when employed, so much so that Bankers employ them to carry their special remittances, householders leave the guard of their property and family to them during their absence, and the highest caste Native in the land would not scruple to place them in positions of trust. There are several Regiments of these men employed by the Native Government under the denomination of the Teer Jung Puttans (Regiments of Archers); they are wonderfully active at all sorts of mining operations, and when leading a vagabond life they often commit robberies by mining galleries for considerable distances until they get beneath the position of their prey. Most of the mines against the Baillee Guard were driven by these men under the

> superintendence of the mutineer Sappers. The Passees alone in Oude, I am sure, number more than 100,000 families, and as one or more of these class is employed in almost every family they make the best detectives in the land . . . As soldiers the Passees though of smaller stature vie in courage with the Seikhs—on one occasion the late Captain Dawson, of the Oude Police, was in a position of some danger, and his detachment was composed about half Passees and half Seikhs; he informed me that if possible the former exceeded the latter in fearlessness.[85]

Such voices, however, were slowly marginalized and Dalit numbers dwindled steadily after 1857. Most British officers were opposed to their recruitment. John Lawrence, in a letter dated 5 January 1861, wrote that the employment of Chamars and Bhungis as soldiers, along with Brahmins and Kshatriyas, was 'like bringing lepers in contact with men of sound health in Europe'.[86] Brigadier P. Gordon from Benares wrote of Chamars and Mehtars, saying they get drunk and are smallish in appearance with ill-developed chests and small limbs. Pasis, Chamars, and Bhangis were repeatedly condemned as drunkards, dirty, and prone to creating disturbances in bazaars.[87] Their manhood was supposedly crude, uncultivated, and inferior.[88]

However, increasing demands for manpower during the two wars forced a revaluation of the recruitment system.[89] Scholars have shown how sweepers, particularly convict sweepers, mainly from UP, were recruited by the Government of India during World War I to serve in the army overseas, although to do the 'lowly' work.[90] In Gorakhpur, Doms were urged to enlist as sweepers,[91] and to serve overseas in the army.[92] Some Ramdasis were recruited and a Chamar regiment was raised during World War II.[93] Dalit soldiers were particularly needed for non-combatant services. In this context, Dalit spokespersons renewed demands for army recruitment during World War II, celebrating a succession of their military achievements during British rule, and providing their own martial perspectives. In an article titled 'Harijan aur Sainik Seva', the valour and martial skill of Dalits were

compared to that of Krishna.[94] A conference of the Adi Hindu Sabha in Lucknow urged that they be urgently recruited in police and military.[95] Even if not recruited in combatant services, the prestige of enrolling in the military in any position was considered great by the low castes, since this was seen as an important means both of seeking concessions from the government and of claiming a raised social status. Dalit genealogies considered enrolment in the army as a defining moment in the establishment of social and political affirmation, prestige, and manhood. It is to be noted that Swami Achhutanand, the founder of the Adi Hindu movement, and one of the leading Dalit publicists of UP, was raised and educated in a military cantonment where his father was employed.

R.S. Hari Prasad Tamta, President of the Kumaon Shilpkar Sabha and a leading member of the UP Adi Hindu Depressed Class Association, actively asserted the role that Dalits could play in the British army. He emphasized the martial role that the Shilpkars of Kumaon had played in the past, pointing to the fluidity of earlier recruitment and Kshatriya *naukri* (employment) traditions of Dalits.[96] Many Shilpkars of Kumaon, mostly Doms, enrolled in the army during this time. They usually went into a labour unit, and not a combatant unit, because of the stigma of untouchability. But any military designation was seized upon by them as a sign of social affirmation. They later recalled their military service, even as porters, to plead for official patronage.[97] Maurice Hallett, governor of UP, acknowledged their valuable contribution to the war effort.[98] Writing in March 1942, Tamta linked it to the restoration of manhood and civilization among the Shilpkars. He further remarked:

> I am one of those who stand for unconditional support of the British Government in this struggle which she has taken up for us all . . . You would be glad to hear that from the District of Almora alone I have been able to get about ten thousand Shilpkars (Depressed Class) recruited in the Army. These Depressed Class men (Shilpkars) are serving in various Pioneer Battalions, Labour

> Units and as Technicians . . . It is a truth poignantly realized by the Depressed Classes of these Provinces that for centuries preceding the British Rule they were steeped in the abysmal ignorance and unspeakable poverty and the social system as well as the political power then conspired to rob them even of their manhood. Had it not been for the British Government which came to their rescue like a merciful act of God, the Depressed Classes could not hope within any measurable time to emerge from degradation and to share benefits of a civilized world.[99]

In a spirited speech he stated, along with Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu, that Shilpkar soldiers represented a simple peasant brotherhood in arms. They were plain, simple, and informal, ready to do a variety of tasks, which many of the upper-caste soldiers would not touch. Unlike the luxurious world of the upper castes, these soldiers represented a model of simplicity and soldierly masculinity.[100] He also said: 'We are immortal souls and these bodies are our garments . . . Just as we feel joy in putting on new clothes in place of old ones, similarly, those who are brave feel joy in entering new bodies after sacrificing old bodies at the altar of duty . . . A coward is afraid of death but a brave person invites it. He fearlessly enters the battlefield . . . The earth is for the brave to enjoy.'[101]

The great aspiration among Dalit men for a military status was regularly reflected in their meetings. Resolutions were adopted by the UP Adi Hindu Mahasabha at its various conferences urging the depressed classes to enrol themselves in the army and police as civic guards, ARP, police, and military services. Repeated requests were made to the government to adopt special measures to create scheduled caste regiments and military police forces, as in the Kumaon division.[102] In a speech made at the Adi Hindu Conference at Allahabad in January 1942, Nand Lal Jaiswar 'Viyogi' argued that the martial character of Dalits had been proved time and again, especially in 1857-[103] Dalits mobilized a language of paternalism through which they tried to invoke the special bond that they shared with the British, the *sarkar*

(government), by faithful service in their army. By repeatedly invoking their service in the army of the ruling power, they tried to turn that entity into a patron which could be approached for concessions.[104] Land was granted to some Choovail and Chaidah Chamars of UP, paying a *jumma* of Rs 250, as a reward for mutiny services.[105] The Scheduled Castes Federation, along with its UP wing, expressed deep concern with the demobilization and the peace-time reorganization of the Indian army and the effects of this on troops, raised from the scheduled castes during the war. It urged, not only an acceptance of present strength in the forces, but also for its expansion, so that scheduled castes could reach the highest ranks of the army.[106] Enrolment in the British army in any capacity was seen by Dalit groups as a major argument, around which they could advance the cause of their fitness for higher levels of political power, equal citizenship, and manhood. Police or army uniforms, medals and military papers became critical markers for the projection of the strength and power of the masculinized body of Dalit men.

The Pasis and Bhangis in colonial UP recuperated a pre-colonial, non-Aryan martial-race heritage, but they attached their martial identity to a new goal—a claim to continued employment in the British army. Pasis repeatedly stated that they had been the bravest and the strongest, and were trusted for generations to serve in the army or to be *chaukidars,* and 'protect' the people. They worshipped the sword, and would rather be turned to stone than be defeated, and that they were therefore the best soldiers. Accusations of criminality were also sometimes turned upside down, when they claimed that some of their community members had resorted to theft, since this was the only way to express their bravery and courage, given the absence of other outlets. In order to use their strength positively, and not in such 'lowly' activities, it was imperative to enrol them in the army.[107] An educated sweeper pointed to a cannon known as *bhangiyon wali taup* (cannon of Bhangis) to mark out their military history. It was reported that in 1762, one Harisingh Bhangi attacked Khwaja Ubaid and captured a house of weapons. He got hold of a cannon which was named *bhangiyon wali*

taup, and which was then passed to Gujarsingh and Lehnasingh Bhangi.[108] Elsewhere, a Dalit writer emphasized the honour of serving in the military, since in this way Dalits could fashion for themselves a different kind of body, acquire a soldierly bearing, and style their headgear and clothes in a way suitable for military service.[109] Army service deeply affected the first generation of Dalit publicists of UP, as elsewhere, who used it as a language of masculinity, social mobility, and as an argument for better jobs and more dignity. Here Dalits seemed to have imbibed a shared strategy of mobility with other castes—imbued already with the rhetoric of manhood—but added their own distinct arguments to it.

Scholars have shown how, in order to overcome their vulnerability, and as a means of self-assertion, caste associations and the urban Shudra poor in UP adopted a language of Hindu masculinity and claims to kshatriyahood.[110] At the beginning of the twentieth century, a section of educated Dalit men too wrote their caste genealogies, advancing claims to martial status as a way of restoring their own dignity while simultaneously contesting the views of upper castes against them. As scholars have shown, such claims were accompanied by different, though sometimes overlapping, trajectories. Thus the backward castes largely embraced a form of militant Hinduism while the untouchables revitalized the Bhakti tradition.[111] At the same time, Dalit caste genealogies produced new investments in history. Dalit caste histories like *Chanvar Puran, Kshatriya Shilpkar Darpan, Nishadvanshavali, Pasi Samaj, Dharuka Kshatriya Vanshavali, Yadav Jivan,* and *Yaduvansh ka Itihas* were written at this time.[112] Their primary concerns were not with economic injustice. Instead, the writings sought to reclaim dignity by questioning Brahmanical theories of origins, which blamed Dalits for all the ills of society.[113] These writers borrowed from a Hindu Puranic tradition and made claims to Kshatriya status or to a lineage from Krishna in order to reclaim a 'pure' historical past. Raghuvanshi, the author of *Chanvar Puran,* claimed that through this book it was proved beyond doubt that the word 'Chanvar' referred to those who were *suryavanshi* in the *dwij kul* (twice born), and

that they belonged to a renowned lineage dating back to the dawn of life.[114] However, while relying on 'traditional' registers to write caste genealogies, Dalit publicists produced something different, as they challenged a history that defined them as defiled.

Simultaneously, and especially with the growth of the Adi Hindu movement, various Dalit castes declared themselves the original inhabitants of India, who had been historically 'demasculinized' and conquered by upper-caste Hindus. In Awadh, Pasis claimed that they had been the lords of the region and their kings reigned at Sandila, Dhaurahara, Mitauli, and Ramkot in the districts of Kheri, Hardoi, and Unao. Ramkot was said to be particularly one of their chief strongholds.[115] Dalit genealogies argued that they had been victims of racial conquest by the 'Aryan' races and Brahmins, who brought with them Hinduism and an 'alien' caste system. These genealogies claimed an exceptional role for the downtrodden in resisting Aryan-Brahmin invaders, though they were finally defeated through chicanery and cunning. As a punishment for resistance, the Dalits were defined as untouchables and banished from society, condemned to poverty, and to feeding on carcasses. While Dalits had no nostalgic yearnings for a pre-colonial or Aryan 'golden age', they constructed their own notions of the past, of a primordial egalitarian society believed to have existed before the Aryan invasions brought Brahmanic Hinduism.[116] These caste genealogies can also be read as masculinized alternative discourses nurtured by an emerging counter-public sphere of Dalit print journalism. Many of their publications explicitly addressed the disabilities of caste while shaping a new sense of Dalit identity. Upper-caste perceptions of untouchability as ritually transcendental were resisted by a process which claimed to 'recover' their true past of 'genuine' masculinity in the pre-historical Indian community. A pamphlet claimed of the Pasis: 'Our men were the strongest and the bravest. We had powerful bodies and we fought many battles without fear. We were experts in wielding *lathis* (bamboo sticks) and guns and digging mines was our specialty.'[117] The trope of Kaliyug became significant here, since it was used repeatedly by Dalits in assertions of

their masculinity in colonial UP. While many upper castes lamented the arrival of this period of destruction, many publications by Dalit writers claimed it was a time to recuperate their lost status. *Chanvar Puran* claimed that in this period of Kaliyug, their *kul* would again rise, and have the opportunity to re-establish the fame of their ancestors.[118]

Modern public-political arenas have been the 'natural' homelands of masculinity.[119] Dalit masculine identity too was politically contingent. Dalit men used politics to lay claims to manhood rights. Scholars have argued that in colonial UP, unlike Maharashtra, politics was not a site of action for the depressed classes.[120] This may be partially true, insofar as Gandhian work among the Harijans is concerned. However, a look at the Adi Hindu movement, which dominated Dalit politics in the 1920s and 1930s, reveals that the manhood of Dalits sought its own ideological expression by equating caste oppression and masculine subjecthood with political rights. Examples of political assertion by Dalit men abound in western UP, where their condition was better. The Chamars historically had much bigger landholdings here and there was less *begar*. By the late colonial period, in regions like Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, and Agra, they had emerged from positions of servitude, and this was reflected in their lifestyle, food, housing, and clothing.[121] They used these opportunities repeatedly to demand more voting rights, to remove the dependency of the franchise upon property, equal employment, and more representation in government bodies by means of continuous petitions. The Adi Hindu movement argued that Dalits were entitled to full membership in the emerging nation. Its conference at Lucknow in 1931 adopted as its first resolution the 'right to equal citizenship, free enjoyment of equal rights, and adequate representation in legislatures and services'.[122] The UP Adi Hindu Depressed Classes Association, and later the UP Scheduled Caste Federation, passed various resolutions to this effect, demanding more jobs in the bureaucracy and a greater share in political power. It even asked for 30 per cent representation through separate electorates for the scheduled castes, or at least a more equitable distribution of seats.[123] This was a male-centred language of resistance and civic rights. An

embattled Dalit masculinity asserted itself in political spaces,[124] where the Dalit citizen was imagined within a male paradigm.[125] Dalit critiques of the gendered character of caste were constantly muted by new forms of caste conflict that increasingly equated the modernization of gender with a reconstitution of caste masculinity. Male political mobilization against caste was determined by the interaction of caste radicalism in a context of colonial modernity and the logical rhetoric of an emerging political nationalism. In a very real sense the stage was set for a male-dominated Dalit public—political sphere.[126]

There were other arenas where Dalits attempted to articulate some sense of manhood, which I will touch upon briefly. Some Dalits even participated in aggressive demonstrations of masculinity in public arenas and in communal violence between Hindus and Muslims which rocked UP in the early twentieth century. In Allahabad, some untouchables asked to be included in Ramlila committees. They claimed that they could raise a force of men used to handling *lathis* that would intimidate the Muslims.[127] Kaluram Chamar from Allahabad claimed that during riots most Muslim *goondas* (hooligans) were *kasais, kunjras, bhatiyaras* (butchers, vegetable sellers, bard singers), and *ekka* (coach) drivers. Hindus could win in riots only if Chamars stood against these forces.[128] Relating physical strength to bravery and heroic deeds, even during riots, enabled them to cultivate a sense of pride and glory in physical labour and strength, to which little social worth was attached by the upper classes. Their participation in such riots permitted contrasting interpretations. Being tough and street-smart was seen as a validation of their manhood, since Dalit men had access to street weapons and their bodies as weapons. This was, too, a crucial way of fighting off poor Muslims for lowly jobs.[129] Similarly, in leather work, which remained largely a Dalit male sphere, Tolaram Chamar claimed that the work of tanning involved a display of masculine strength. It was not because it was stigmatized that Chamars did it, but because they alone were capable of displaying such physical power and

hard work.[130] Pasis claimed to be the best watchmen, because of their physical power to keep crime under control.[131]

Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu, who established one of the first Dalit presses in Lucknow, challenged pictorial representations of Dalits by stating that Dalit intellectuals should pay careful attention to their dress style and present to the world a body which appeared efficiently modern. Discourses around demeanour, clothing, and the elevation of male status were also tied to conversions to Christianity. Missionary literature claimed that conversions provided manhood to Dalits by making them into respectable men.[132] Godfrey Phillips said: 'These movements are making the outcaste into a man, and giving him a man's place in the world—a place he has never enjoyed before.'[133]

Ironically, while lamenting conversions, reformers too acknowledged that they provided Dalits with an elevated masculine stature. Cartoons, published in *Chand* and Arya Samaj publications,[134] usually depicted two outcaste men together: one converted and the other unconverted. The change that conversion brought about in Dalit men—in modes of dressing, walking style, gait, and status—was present for all to see. One cartoon depicted the converted outcaste man dressed in a suit, wearing shoes and walking ahead royally as a sahib. The unconverted Dalit walked behind, barefoot, carrying a load on his head. The caption read:

> *chalta hai age ban sahib, isayi jo hua achchut,*
> *jo hindu, wah murgi dhota, peeche yeh kaisi kartoot?*
>
> (The untouchable who has become a Christian walks ahead as a sahib. The untouchable Hindu carries the load of chicken on his head. How ironic!)[135]

Another cartoon had the converted Dalit man flaunting his wealth, and giving wages to the unconverted untouchable man:

> *ek that se gali dekar daan kar raha mazdoori!*
> *ek jati, achchut isayi, mein rehti kitni doori?*

(One curses with arrogance and donates wages. Why such distance between the same caste—one Christian, one untouchable?)[136]

There were others which depicted converted Dalits playing sports, getting their shoes polished, etc., by the unconverted. The elevation of status through conversions was stark. It was claimed by some Bhangis and Chamars around Meerut that conversion to Christianity gave them a new life through literacy, dignity, and stature. They too saw in conversion a way of restoring dignity and manhood, though from a different position than Hindu reformers or missionaries.[137] Dalits were also writing themselves into colonial modernity, using Christianity, which involved, for them, a certain degree of freedom from social oppression.[138]

Control over their women's movements and sexualities also be-came an important axis for Dalit masculine assertion. In UP, as elsewhere, women's roles affected the status of a caste. The Chamars of Moradabad announced that they would allow their women less liberty of movement.[139] Those of Dehra Dun and Saharanpur started to advocate the wearing of dhotis by their women when cooking food and forbade them to visit bazaars to sell grass.[140] A Jatia Chamar Sabha at Meerut, attended by over 4000 Chamars, passed a resolution requiring their females to go into purdah.[141] Wealthy urban Chamars began putting their wives under seclusion, proclaiming a new role for the women of their community.[142] At a meeting of Bhangis at Mathura, it was decided that their women should not be sent daily to bazaars.[143] A Pasi panchayat in Meerut resolved that their women should not go out for daily labour.[144] The Bhangis of Bulandshahr passed resolutions in their panchayats forbidding their womenfolk from attending *melas* (fairs).[145] The Khatiks of Lucknow resolved not to allow their women to peddle fruit on the streets, shops being specified as sale venues.[146] Scholars have seen such moves as ways of strengthening claims to upward mobility.[147] Dalits here were also drawing on norms of dominant manhood which emanated from the upper castes, claiming Dalit

masculinity not through heterogeneity but through mimicry. These were markers of masculinity in the domestic sphere in reaction to their perceived 'emasculation'. Others have argued that these measures were not simply Sanskritization or even assertions of patriarchal control, but attempts to restore dignity to Dalit women. The regulation of sexuality was an important axis for the politicization of caste identity. Dalit reformers' masculinity was predicated on the reform of gender within their community and the defence of community honour against the disdain of outsiders.[148]

Conclusion

Dominant cultures produced a body of stereotypical representations of Dalits. Attributes of docility, meekness, stupidity, and emasculation were used to represent several untouchable castes subsumed under the Dalit label. Conflicting, though still formulaic, images also portrayed them as violent, criminal, sexually potent drunkards. Dalit 'othering' was accomplished through a repertoire of feminine and masculine stereotypes. However, Dalits were not passive onlookers.

Dalit men imaged their masculine identities implicitly in multiple ways. From marginal social positions, the manhood of Dalits sought its own ideological equilibrium between caste oppression and masculine subjecthood. They put forward gendered claims for dignity and social justice while implementing strategies to ascend the social ladder in the face of exclusion. By invoking a masculine past, claiming a place in the army, arguing for more political space through dress and culture, Dalit publicists and reformers sought entry, tenuous though it may have been, into a modern urban public sphere. They deployed the means offered by the colonial economy, for example by employment, print, educational opportunities, and religious conversions, for implicit assertions of Dalit masculinities. Even while the crisis of Dalits was not consciously perceived or articulated in terms of masculinity, their discourses and actions through these arenas became a means to recuperate manhood. It became a subtle trope for coping with and overcoming to an extent their sense of powerlessness, alienation, and

social impotence. It was a performative act, a survival strategy, a form of resistance to limited structures of opportunity, and a way to argue for more rights, dignity, and better employment opportunities. Human rights were expressed in the claim to manhood.

The function of masculinity, however, is also to control. Even though from different backgrounds and perceptions, Dalit men at times colluded with dominant notions of masculinity and fed into binaries by acting out a received gendered script. There were shifts in definitions of manhood—from production to consumption, from respectability to bodily assertiveness, from manliness to masculinity. Patriarchal practices were often enhanced by Dalits, particularly in domestic spheres, even while control over women was also linked to arguing for more respectability for them. Dalits also contributed to dominant visions of masculinity when they sometimes emerged as actors of communal violence, even though they did so for contested and different reasons. At the same time, Dalit framing did produce dislocations and cracks in those very hegemonic constructions, as they often appropriated it creatively and interpreted it on their own terms.

It is not enough to say that Dalit self-representations of masculinity in colonial India were subversive, it is important to place them in the context of and in relation to representations of masculinity by others. Dalit masculinity was not a stable category, but responsive to its cultural, historical, social, and political embeddedness. Ultimately its construction was neither fully cohesive nor entirely innocent, since gender identities were themselves not immutable, but characterized by uncertainties and ambiguities. One hopes that Dalit men would evolve and ultimately dismantle the very ideological fetters that fasten them to a corrosive paradigm of masculinity and use it more as a creative tool to argue for more dignity and rights.

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10

Identities and Histories

Some Lower-Caste Narratives from Early Twentieth-Century Bengal*

SUMIT SARKAR

A tract entitled *Namasudra Darpan* (A Mirror for Namasudras) was published from Calcutta in 1909, the first, chronologically, of the seven Namasudra texts which will constitute the core source-material of this essay.[1] In an appendix, its author, Rashbihari Roy Pandit, a villager from Tarali in the south-central Bengal district of Khulna, describes the considerable difficulties he had in getting his book published from a Calcutta press. Printing costs had been met by small donations, mostly of one or two rupees, collected by the author by personally visiting a large number of places scattered over Khulna, 24 Parganas, Jessore, and Hooghly districts, as well as Calcutta. He carefully provides lists of contributors and places, claims that visiting Namasudra settlements has become for him now a lifelong 'pilgrimage', and goes on to regret that 'we have so long been ignorant even of where, in which districts, people of our lineage have been living.' But now there is the Census, and Roy Pandit goes on to cite

extensively from the 1901 statistics, giving the total number (over two million) and district-wise distribution of Namasudras in Bengal.[2]

The autobiographical note with which the text begins—which, we are told, the printer had demanded from the Tarali villager—unwittingly reveals that, despite its claim to be a 'mirror',[3] Roy Pandit's book was not so much an expression of an already given identity as part of an ongoing effort at its constitution. Not only had Namasudras of different places been largely ignorant of each other's existence, their surnames often had occupational rather than caste associations. Thus the author's father, a goldsmith, had taken the surname Swarnakar, but Rashbihari, a schoolteacher, was a Pandit. Two years later, another pamphlet described Namasudras as being 'principally agriculturists, as prescribed by Aryadharma', but including also some engaged in the occupations of 'manufacturing and trade, jotedari, talukdari, haoladari [different forms of intermediate tenures], teaching, law, western and indigenous medicine, administrative jobs . . .'[4] There were clearly possibilities, therefore, of alternative solidarities and fissures.

What made the unifying Namasudra project important for Roy Pandit and many others, however, was a common sense of discrimination and injustice. Specifically, as these and other pamphlets emphasise, there was the habit among many 'Brahmans, Vaidyas, and Kayasthas . . . who did not deserve the title of "bhadralok"'[5] of using the derogatory epithet 'Chandal' to refer to people of diverse occupations and endogamous groups but a roughly similar, despised, social position.[6] Such contempt could stimulate a sense of solidarity among 'Chandals' or 'Namasudras' of otherwise very different socioeconomic levels, and keep them apart from people with whom they might have had more in common in terms of occupation or class. Tracts like *Namasudra Darpan* make clear, further, that asserting a more respectable identity was vitally dependent on the projection of an alternative 'history'. The subtitle of Roy Pandit's pamphlet promised 'a detailed account of everything related to the Namasudra jati, from its origin to its present situation.' The need for history, paradoxically, was

enhanced precisely because identity was far more of a project than a reality with a well-established past.

The Namasudra tracts comprise only a small proportion of the unprecedented flood of both high- and lower-caste writings in Bengali on caste themes, claims, and disputes between *c.* 1900 and the 1920s.[7] 'History' entered most of these tracts in ways that were highly diverse, but always crucial for the identities and arguments being projected. An exploration of the specificities of lower-caste handling, appropriations and inventions of history has some intrinsic interest: it can also help to raise a number of important methodological queries.

Basically, I am trying here to interrogate and go beyond a series of polarities that have been common in the current anthropological-cum-historical literature on caste. A brief overview of these questions may be helpful.

As against the 'essentialist' assumptions of many earlier Indologists, anthropologists, and political scientists,[8] there is today a counter-orthodoxy of more or less extreme 'constructivism' that emphasises the 'imagined' nature of caste and other identities, their 'invention' through colonial policies and/or discursive patterns—and here Census classificatory strategies tend to be given pride of place. I intend to argue that while identities like caste are certainly not fixed, given, or unchanging, neither can their construction be reduced to colonial discourses alone. Namasudra identity formation was not just a function of Census operations: it also had wider socio-economic and cultural dimensions.

A second polarity has been that between the Dumontian emphasis on structural harmony and consensus through effective and total Brahmanical hegemony,[9] and the binary power/resistance model which, I have argued elsewhere, has been central to the Subaltern Studies approach in all its shifting forms.[10] The first major attempt to extend the latter model to questions of caste, by Partha Chatterjee in 1989, began, significantly, with a critique of Dumont.[11] I share much of that critique, but find the assumption of a sharp and total disjunction

between the domains of high-caste power and subordinate autonomy equally unhelpful. The histories imagined by the Namasudras developed through selective appropriations and inversions, in the interstices of dominant Brahmanical-cum-colonial views. To read them as signs of complete integration or consensus is quite impossible, but neither do they indicate any totally distinct subaltern world.

Such approaches, I feel, are inadequate for understanding—more precisely, historicising—Brahmanical hegemony. Dumontian structuralism strengthens tendencies towards assuming 'traditional', 'conservative', or 'orthodox' views on caste to have been essentially unchanging. In sharp contrast, the frequent combination more recently of the twin stresses of subaltern cultural autonomy and colonial discursive construction can lead towards a virtual elision of high-caste domination within pre-colonial times. Brahmanical controls become either all-pervasive and conflict-free, or are assumed to have been all-but-negligible in what becomes a somewhat romanticised vision of a pre-modern world of flexible, non-authoritarian community life. Paradoxically, extremes meet: indigenous power and oppression tend to disappear, since even in the second approach these have been reduced to being epiphenomena of colonial-Western cultural domination alone. The political implications here can be fairly retrogressive.[12]

In anthropological and historical research alike, the prevalent tendency has been to research on castes and caste movements more or less singly, or at most upon their interactions at the level of the village or locality selected for fieldwork. This is of course quite understandable in terms of the logic of intensive study of a manageable amount of new empirical material. I have come to feel, however, that at times an alternative, more interactive and intertextual approach might be helpful, juxtaposing high- and lower-caste movements and texts. The present essay forms part of a still-unfinished work where I am trying to explore the rise and decline of a 'language' of caste in early-twentieth-century Bengal.[13] Such overall shifts in the relative importance of caste as an issue cannot obviously be explained via studies of the ebb and flow of particular caste movements looked at in isolation from each

other. More significantly, perhaps, an emphasis upon interrelationships could have two other advantages. It might help us test more rigorously the opposed stereotypes—of harmonious integration and clear-cut disjunction of levels—about which I have already raised some doubts. And it could reduce the temptation to conceptualise an 'identity'—in this case, caste—in virtual isolation. For, as an important study of the formation of communal ideologies in early-twentieth-century Bengal has pointed out, there is a 'fundamental problem . . . in the obsession with the singularity of collective identities.'[14] The pressures and stimuli of late-colonial times, after all, constituted conditions of possibility for a more-or-less simultaneous consolidation of not one but a multiplicity of often cross-cutting identities, of anti-colonial 'national', religious or 'communal', regional, ethnic, gender, caste, or class. Identities were therefore not only hardened, they could also simultaneously become more fragile: and herein lay the roots of many of the problems and tensions of twentieth-century South Asia.

My principal focus, however, will remain on Namasudra tracts. This requires some explanation, for they are not all that numerous—less so, in fact, than the available textual productions of several other subordinate-caste formations.[15] My principal reason is that with the Namasudras there is the advantage of an excellent and detailed narrative, indisputably the best so far on the subject of caste in Bengal, reconstructed by Sekhar Bandyopadhyay principally on the basis of archival documents.[16] This permits a juxtaposition bringing out the patterns of stresses and omissions in the tracts, for I must emphasise that sometimes they are illuminating precisely through their silences. Important hints about potential fissures emerge, which might help to explain why and how identities may not have continuous and ascendant histories, but can also decline and disintegrate (as seems to have largely happened with the Namasudras after the 1940s).

More generally, I want to use the theme of silences and disjunctures for a brief discussion, in my concluding section, of the potentialities, but also the limits, of the current strong swing away from Marxian class approaches towards a concentration on identity politics alone—a focus

that is, moreover, often accompanied by a fairly uncritical valorisation. I am troubled particularly by the tendency to conceptualise identity in a narrowly 'culturalist' mode. My intention, then, is to end with a certain problematisation of my starting-point: identity and history entered through textual study.

II

The flood of caste tracts from around *c.* 1900 onwards seems at first sight to provide strong confirmation of arguments for colonial, and particularly Census, constructions of caste. In 1901, Risley as Census Commissioner ordered for the first (and as it happened, the last) time the classification of jatis according to notions of social precedence prevalent in each locality. This immediately conjured into existence a flood of claims and counter-claims—the famous one-and-a-half maunds of petitions about which O'Malley complained in his Bengal Census Report of 1911.[17] What is less often remembered, however, is that Gait, Risley's successor as all-India Census Commissioner, dropped the whole effort to establish precedence in 1911 as involving too much trouble, and went back to a purely alphabetical classification of jatis.[18] And questions about caste, other than the 'Scheduled' category, have been excluded from all Census operations after 1941, with no visible impact on caste tensions or movements over the major part of the subcontinent.

I have argued elsewhere that there was often a significant input from relatively privileged, high-caste indigenous groups into Census classificatory strategies and other forms of 'colonial knowledge'.[19] More generally, we need to remain aware of the possibilities of the invention of identities and traditions 'from below'.[20] Memorials to Census authorities written in English can be a little deceptive in the impression they convey about relative priorities, as Lucy Carroll has pointed out.[21] Such petitions were organised at Census time, and sometimes helped to prod the authorities into accepting caste-names considered more respectable.[22] But caste movements were also engaged in many other

kinds of activities, and a striking feature of *Namasudra Darpan,* and indeed the bulk of lower-caste vernacular tracts, is in fact the relative unimportance of the Census within the structure of their arguments. For Roy Pandit, Census statistics were a valuable source of information, but otherwise not central for his project; five of the six other Namasudra texts constituting my sample do not mention the Census at all.[23]

Official accounts like the *Faridpur District Gazetteer* (1925) traced back what the latter described as 'a spirit of sturdy independence . . . shown for some generations past' by Namasudras to certain events in 1872–3 which had little or nothing to do with Census or other direct colonial interventions, and which in fact developed in a world rather far removed even from that of the tract-writers.[24] According to a contemporary police report, Kayasthas and other high castes had refused 'with taunts and reproaches reflecting on the Chundals' an invitation to a funeral feast extended by a rich Chandal of Amgram village in Bakargunj district. In protest Chandals, particularly of the neighbouring Gopalganj and Maksudpur police stations of Faridpur, organised through a meeting of village headmen a massive boycott of all agricultural and other services to high castes (as well as Muslims), threatening to paralyse cultivation, as 'at present fields belonging to Mahomedans and other castes are cultivated by Chundals, who for their trouble take half the produce. . . .' In addition, respectability was sought to be enhanced by stopping Chandal women from going to markets: an important reminder that caste mobility efforts have been associated all too often with the tightening of patriarchal restrictions on women. Chandal village heads complained to the police officer about 'the grievances they suffered from the Hindus, more especially from the Kayesths, whose treatment of them was intolerable.' They also wanted an end to the practice by which Chandal inmates of jails were automatically used as sweepers. That was not at all their caste profession, and, in addition, it went against the government claim 'to treat all castes on terms of equality': in a very interesting hint that elements of a modern discourse of equal rights had already started

getting appropriated by a very subordinated and oppressed group.[25] The boycott could not be kept up for long, for Chandal sharecroppers did not have the resources to keep it going. Interestingly, none of the Namasudra tracts that I have seen make the slightest reference to this movement, or for that matter to somewhat similar incidents, with a clearly agrarian-cum-class dimension, in 1907–9. We learn about both only from official records: silences that hint at potential internal fissures, to which I intend to return.

Sugata Bose has written about a brief 'new frontier of opportunity' for those sections of peasants that could benefit for a time from commercialisation. He refers in particular to Mahishyas, and in central and Eastern Bengal to lower-caste and Muslim agriculturists helped by high jute prices which reigned, with some marked ups and downs, from *c.* 1907 to the mid-1920s.[26] Significantly, there is a coincidence of dates here with the proliferation of both lower-caste and Muslim vernacular tracts coming out from small towns and villages.[27] For the Namasudras, the more decisive underpinning for efforts at advancement probably came from a transition from fishing and boating to settled agriculture, as marshlands were opened up to cultivation in the course of the nineteenth century.[28] The Gopalganj subdivision of south-west Faridpur, where about a fifth of the total Namasudra population of Bengal came to live, and which became the heart of their cultural and political improvement efforts, had been a 'vast marsh' which by 1921 had a population density of 858 to the square mile. This was a rice-growing area, and jute was un- important—but Gopalganj was located on an important riverine trade route linking East Bengal jute-exporting areas through Khulna to Calcutta. Orakandi in Gopalganj became the centre of the Matua religious sect, and the metrical biography of Guruchand Thakur has a long account of the trading activities he carried on with great success himself, and urged on his disciples.[29] But such economic advance tends to be divisive, benefiting only a minority: Sekhar Bandyopadhyay provides some data about a growth in the number of Namasudra landless sharecroppers

particularly after the onset of the agricultural depression from the late 1920s.[30]

The emergence of lower-caste authors and readers obviously presupposed a certain spread of formal education. A link can be suggested also between the widespread assumption in early-twentieth-century caste tracts about the need for 'historical' arguments, and the new importance given to history in schools of the 'modern' or colonial kind. History of any sort seems to have been absent from the curricula of the traditional *pathshala,* which had concentrated on practical training in language, arithmetic, and accountancy, plus bits of religious, moral, and grammatical instruction. The printed Bengali textbooks which the Calcutta School Book Society began bringing out from 1817, in contrast, chose history as a principal subject, and this pattern was only intensified over time, with Vidyasagar, for instance, himself bringing out a vernacular adaptation of a well-known textbook on Indian history.[31]

But it is possible to exaggerate the specific importance of what is usually described as modern, Western, or English education—alternately hailed in historiography as harbinger of renaissance modernity, or denounced as key instrument of cultural subjugation—in creating the conditions of possibility for lower-caste writings and affirmations. What was involved at best, so far as such subordinate groups were concerned, was in any case not English but vernacular schooling, and even there literacy rates remained abysmally low. The Census figures for 1911, for instance, calculated vernacular literacy among Namasudras at 4.9%, and literacy in English to be a negligible 0.22%.[32] Nor need such marginal presence of vernacular literacy have been an entirely new phenomenon, for Adam's famous reports on indigenous education in Bengal (1835, 1838) indicate the presence of a fair number of non-high-caste boys and even teachers in village schools—unlike girls, who appear to have been almost totally absent.[33]

The really new and crucial developments were linked, rather, with the coming of print, and the associated rise of vernacular prose. Through

multiplying and cheapening the physical availability of printed texts, these enabled, over time, the emergence of elements of a literary public sphere (to borrow Habermas's term) that was potentially open to groups previously excluded from scribal culture: a growing number of women, a sprinkling of lower-caste men. The other related near-novelty was that open or public argumentation, beyond the boundaries of the traditional high-caste and ulema male literati, now became both possible and necessary over a host of issues—including, notably, caste, particularly from around the turn of the century.

The difference that print culture made can be gauged through a glance back at the kind of evidence historians have had to depend on in efforts at reconstructing the history of caste mobility in pre-print, pre-colonial times. Hitesranjan Sanyal's pioneering study of changes in the status of Sadgops and other upwardly mobile groups in pre-colonial Bengal had proceeded through comparing the caste lists given in two Sanskrit *upapuranas* composed in *c.* thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Bengal with scattered references in later Bengali literary texts. He then correlated these with other available data about economic developments and went on to make a highly original analysis of shifts in temple patronage.[34] What Sanyal could not use was written evidence about the discussions and debates that, one would guess, must have often accompanied the *vyavasthas* or rulings given by pandits, or orders issued by kings and chiefs, through which changes in relative status, or rejections of such claims, were sometimes formalised.[35] Such discussions would have remained at the level of orality, and, more crucially, been confined to limited numbers of high-caste literati or courtiers, in a pre-print culture where manuscripts would inevitably be scanty, easily perishable, and expensive.[36]

The caste literature of early-twentieth-century Bengal, in contrast, often gives the impression of an open debate, with a considerable degree of intertextuality across caste lines. Two examples must suffice. In 1914 a well-known Calcutta-based conservative Brahman journalist, Panchkori Bandopadhyay, blamed Kayastha pretensions to Kshatriya status for the flood of similar claims being put forward by much more

lowly groups 'like Rajbansi, Pod, Jhalomalo, and Kaivartas', with Namasudras even demanding recognition as Brahmans.[37] The previous year, an otherwise obscure but equally conservative high-caste villager from Naldha, Khulna district, had similarly condemned the spill-over effects of Kayastha claims and ridiculed the argument developed by many lower-caste spokesmen that there were no pure Kshatriyas anyway, since an ancient text described all of them having been exterminated by Parashuram. Was Parashuram, an incarnation of Vishnu, then a kind of Sirajuddoulah, he asked rhetorically, in an interesting combination of caste and religious prejudices.[38]

Such intertextuality strengthens my argument about the limitations of the prevalent study of caste movements in isolation from each other. But there is an additional reason why interconnections need careful attention. Lower-caste tracts often acknowledge their indebtedness to individual members of Brahman or other high castes, particularly for guidance concerning Sanskrit texts.[39] Beyond the question of purely personal contacts, there are signs at times of a significant role, that has remained virtually unnoticed so far,[40] of the so-called 'Varna' or 'Patit' Brahmans. These were the ritual experts of 'degraded' status who served castes below the high and the 'Nabasakh' levels.[41] Varna Brahmans could attain respectability only if the caste they served also rose in the social scale. In addition, one encounters fairly often, in contemporary tracts and literary representations alike, the figure of the poor Brahman, ready to preside over rituals, sell vyavasthas, and generally help in the mobility efforts of lower castes. With at least a smattering of knowledge of sacred texts, both groups could provide valuable assistance in efforts at upward mobility. At the same time, they would be carriers of Brahmanical norms and practices to lower levels, helping to impart to their movements a more strictly sanskritising character.[42] The Varna Brahman presence is most evident in Mahishya tracts[43]—and, not fortuitously, perhaps, this was the most moderate and assimilationist of the major movements in Bengal. But Namasudras also had their

'degraded' Brahmans, some of whom in 1946 organised a petition pleading for official recognition of a higher status.[44]

My analysis of Namasudra texts will therefore be preceded by a glance at the ways in which contemporary high-caste writers were looking at histories of caste and caste inequality, in justification, or sometimes as part of reform projects. As I have already suggested, the 'traditional' or the 'orthodox' cannot be assumed to be unchanging, and there is a need to bring out some of its early-twentieth-century specificities.

III

The textual-cum-mythic justification of varna hierarchy is generally supposed to be grounded in the *Purusha Sukta,* a possibly late interpolation in the *Rg Veda* where the body of the primal being is sacrificed, and Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra emerge from its mouth, arms, thighs, and feet respectively. Like the more 'philosophical' analogy of the three higher varnas with a hierarchy of moral qualities, *sattva, raja, tama,* this provides no explanation for the multitude of subdivisions or jatis within each varna which constitute for most purposes the more relevant meaning of caste. For that the standard orthodox Brahmanical theory, provided classically in the *Manusmriti,* has been *varnasankara* or miscegenation. The inferior jatis are supposed to have originated from illicit sexual relations violating the ban on intermarriage. Degradation results particularly from *pratiloma,* the woman having intercourse with a man of lower caste: thus for Manu the Chandal is defined as the descendant of a Sudra father and a Brahman mother.[45] Important here is the close interrelationship assumed between right caste and gender hierarchy, for caste depends on purity of lineage, and that demands male control over feminine sexuality. The vision of dystopia conveyed through the motif of Kali-yuga—the last, most degenerate and present era in the endlessly repetitive four-yuga cycle—reiterates this basic assumption by locating the root of evils in the overmighty Sudra and the insubordinate and immoral woman.

The theory of origin through varnasankara is important for medieval Sanskrit texts, such as the thirteenth-fourteenth-century *Brihaddharmapuranam* and the *Brahmavaivartapuranam,* which try to fit the specific intricacies of the Bengal caste structure into this model. A degree of scepticism is probably in order, however, about the reach of these ideas beyond the Brahmanical literati, particularly before the combined impact, in course of the nineteenth century, of Orientalist scholarship, vernacular translations of classical texts, and dissemination through print. Niharranjan Ray was surely right when he pointed out, way back in 1949, that varna was a Brahmanical classificatory schema, seeking, not necessarily with much success, to impose order upon a far more variegated and mobile social world.[46] Variations had to be introduced at times to explain anomalies, like the unusually low status of the Subarnabaniks (or goldsmiths) of Bengal despite their pursuit of a profession both respectable and lucrative. The *Ballal-carita,* a medieval text of uncertain provenance and date, attributed this demotion to the arbitrary actions of the Sena king Ballal Sen, thus implicitly admitting that caste order was far from immutable, but quite open to state intervention.[47] One needs to note also another, probably more significant, disjunction, this time between medieval Sanskrit texts and vernacular literary representations of caste. The sixteenth-century *Chandimangala* presented caste distinctions as entirely bound up with distinct occupations, which it enumerated in great detail. The occupational groups were arranged in an order implicitly hierarchical, moving from the Brahmans down to the 'itar' or lowly people (among whom are mentioned the 'Chandals, who sell salt'), but there is no interest at all in explaining this order in terms either of the primal Purusha or miscegenation.[48]

Pre-colonial accounts of caste order thus either present it as a matter of course, or trace it immediately to an origin in a single happening: what is missing in such explanations of hierarchised inequality is any sense of social or historical process. Lower-caste origin myths, transmitted orally and recorded by colonial or post-colonial investigators, do not appear all that different in narrative form, though

the accompanying values might be not justificatory but a shifting combination of acceptance-cum-resentment. The emphasis there, once again, is on an original pollution through a single mistake, or sometimes a trick, played on the ancestors of the community.[49]

The major change that came about in the colonial era was through the emergence and development of the Aryan myth, so central to Orientalism, from the time of William Jones onwards. Based on a dubious leap from linguistic to racial affinity, this in diverse forms has become so much the dominant common sense that it is often difficult to be aware of its insidious presence even in liberal discourses about cultural 'integration', 'unity in diversity', or 'civilisational values'. In inverted ways, it has been quite central also even for most oppositional, anti-Brahmanical theories of caste.[50] 'History', of some kinds, has clearly entered the scene now, but its critical potential tends to get recuperated by essentialisms of race or ethnicity.

Jogendranath Bhattacharya's *Hindu Castes and Sects* (1896) can provide a convenient benchmark to gauge the extent of changes brought about through colonial developments in high-caste justifications of caste. The apologetic dimension is muted but never absent in this detailed study written by a Nadia pandit-cum-lawyer just around the time discussions in Bengal of caste were beginning, rather abruptly, to become a flood.[51] Bhattacharya has little patience with the varnasankara theory of the origin of 'mixed' castes, for this assumes an unlikely knowledge of 'irregular marriage and illicit sexual intercourse'. He also recognises that the occupational bases of caste distinctions have become very porous. But caste remains valuable for him as providing 'bonds of union between races and clans . . . the legislation of the Rishis was calculated not only to bring about union between the isolated clans that lived in primitive India, but to render it possible to assimilate within each group the foreign hordes that were expected to pour into the country from time to time.'[52] A wide range of Bengal intellectuals, including for a time Rabindranath, would elaborate justifications of caste in terms of such a model of differentiated yet harmonious unity during the next, Swadeshi decade.[53]

It would be simplistic, however, to reduce the shifts in the conceptualisations of caste to an unilinear flow of acculturation or derivation from dominant Orientalist-colonial discourses. Three qualifications are needed, in terms of variations in colonial constructs, their highly selective Indian appropriations, and evidence of considerable interpenetration. What emerged over time was a discourse as much, if not more, Brahmanical as colonial.

Trautmann's study[54] has highlighted the many variations within the Aryan myth, shifts and tensions which make highly problematic the homogenised assumptions about 'Orientalism' made so influential by Said and sought to be applied to India by Inden and many others. I am concerned much more in this essay, however, with Census reports, obviously the most relevant kind of official discourse for questions of caste. These too reveal a remarkable fluidity of classificatory schema. Thus information regarding caste was placed by Beverley in the first Bengal Census Report (1872) in a chapter entitled 'Nationalities, Races and Tribes of the People'. Sixty years later, the 1931 Report was still admitting that returns under the 'Caste, Tribe and Race' schedule remained 'most unsatisfactory and troublesome', and noted that the indigenous Bengali term, *jat,* and its derivatives, could be applicable to communities of race, tribe, caste, and nationality alike.[55] The choice of caste as the key building-block of Indian society was a gradual process, in which the decisive moves were made by H.H. Risley in the course of compiling his ethnographic glossary of Bengal tribes and castes published in 1891. The central assumption, as Risley acknowledged, came from Sir Alfred Lyall's *Asiatic Studies:* 'the gradual Brahmanising of the aboriginal non-Aryan or casteless tribes'.[56] This implied an evolutionary sequence from tribe to caste, in a civilising process presided over by the men of Aryan race led by their Brahmans. Historical in appearance, Risley's framework in fact was deeply shot through with assumptions both essentialist and racist. Thus he admitted —in fact, emphasised—that often customs and ceremonies had been borrowed by lower castes 'in the most liberal fashion from the higher castes'.[57] E.A. Gait, who was in charge of the Bengal Census in 1901,

went so far as to confess that 'the more ignorant classes have very little idea as to what caste means . . .'[58] Yet Risley remained determined to ground caste difference in race. At one point he explicitly stated the political advantages of this move, and proceeded to locate that difference in anthropometry, the measurement of heads and noses to establish physical race distinctions between high and low castes. The alternative view of Nesfield, who had argued that caste was essentially related to occupation, and that the Aryan/non-Aryan divide was no longer very significant, was therefore rejected.[59] It did not entirely disappear, though, and occasionally surfaced in some later Census reports as well as in Indian discussions around caste.[60]

Ten years before the publication of Risley's ethnographic glossary, the Protestant missionary M.A. Sherring, in a similarly entitled volume, made a violent attack on caste, attempting a 'natural history' where responsibility for its many evils was fixed on Brahman selfishness and conspiratorial, divide-and-rule designs.[61] There has been a strong tendency, particularly in recent years, to represent such views to have been dominant within colonial attitudes, since they seem to fit so well with Christian missionary and Utilitarian–rationalist–'Enlightenment' assumptions alike. But Risley, almost certainly, was far more typical at least of late-colonial officialdom when he took up with great consistency a diametrically opposite stance, thus once again demonstrating that colonial discourse was never a monolith. His 1891 volume went very far indeed in its display of sympathy for Brahmanical values, to the extent of virtually supporting infant marriage in 'oriental' conditions—for that ensured parental control over marriage and purity of caste lineage, which was of course an essential part of his race theory of caste.[62] Risley advocated greater respect for what he called 'the standard Indian theory of caste', and was sure that his views would meet with approval 'from the leaders of the Hindu community in all parts of Bengal, among whom both the orthodox and the advanced lay considerable stress upon the purity of their Aryan descent . . .'[63]

Such divergences created conditions for widely different, even mutually opposed, Indian appropriations, with for instance a strong element of a Brahman conspiracy theory entering the assumptions of radical lower-caste thinkers like Jyotirao Phule, with some inputs probably from early missionary influences.[64] And Risley's confidence was certainly not misplaced. In 1896, Jogendranath Bhattacharya began his book with a violent attack on Sherring and considerable approval for Risley.[65] But interaction rather than appropriation might be the more relevant term at times, so far as relations between sections of the high-caste literati and colonial officials were concerned. Data for the 1891 survey had been collected with the help of 190 local correspondents. Being literate, most of them would have been necessarily high caste.[66] In 1901 Risley ordered the classification of castes in each locality in census reports 'by social precedence as recognised by native public opinion at the present day.' His subordinate, Bengal Superintendent of Census E.A. Gait, added an important, practical gloss. Since 'it often happens that a Hindu knows or cares but little of any caste other than his own . . . the decision must rest with enlightened public opinion, and not with public opinion generally'—once again, high-caste literati opinion would evidently enjoy a very high premium.[67] The two-way flow continued: the sevenfold structure that Gait worked out for Bengal castes on the basis of this data has remained the basis for all later academic analysis.[68] It is not to be found with such clarity in Jogendranath Bhattacharya's account of 1896.

The question of caste hierarchy remained somewhat marginal in high-caste debates and activities till around the 1890s, no doubt largely because, unlike in Phule's Maharashtra, it was not yet perceived as under serious threat. The major divisive issues in *bhadralok* life till then concerned religious beliefs and rituals (particularly image worship, under severe attack from Christians and Brahmos), and the condition of women. I have argued elsewhere that though references to caste hierarchy did sometimes enter the dominant conservative discourse of *adhikari-bheda,* this was usually as means towards the defence of beliefs in many gods, image worship, and patriarchal values.[69] Major social

reform initiatives were related primarily to themes of gender injustice within the reformers' own middle-class, high-caste milieu. The Brahmos did occasionally attack caste, but their concrete initiatives in this regard tended to remain tokenistic, confined in practice to themselves giving up the Brahmanical sacred thread and promoting intercaste marriage within their own, overwhelmingly educated high-caste, community. Even the theoretical critiques—as for instance some stray comments by Rammohan Roy—focused upon the barriers caste distinctions set for patriotic unity, rather than social injustice.[70]

The first book-length Brahmo attack on caste, Sibnath Shastri's *Jatibheda,* came out only in 1884. This did include an impressive historical account of multiplicity of jatis as a degeneration compared to early Vedic times,[71] produced by the subordination of non-Aryans and, interestingly, the restricted transmission of high culture along hereditary lines because of the absence of print. There was also a passionately indignant chapter, making effective use of the diatribes against Sudras in the *Manusmriti*, while the valorisation already well developed in much bhadralok writing of ancient Hindu glory, as contrasted with decline under 'Muslim tyranny', was implicitly subverted: for Sibnath associated the Buddha, Muslim rule, and of course the colonial period, with progress in the conditions of the Sudras. The *Manusmriti* passages cited by Sibnath, along with many of his historical arguments and assumptions, were to be frequently used in many later tracts written by or on behalf of lower castes. But even for Sibnath, the primary evil of *jatibheda* concerned 'divisiveness and lack of fraternal feeling'. In addition, he felt that it hindered highcaste improvement through its insistence upon eugenically harmful marriage restrictions. Caste also encouraged contempt for manual labour and intellectual narrowness among high castes (by banning sea voyages, for instance). Significantly, *Jatibheda* revealed no awareness at all about the Faridpur Namasudra movement of the previous decade.[72] Judging from the official press excerpts, Bengali newspapers of 1873 had also been totally silent about that early act of lower-caste agrarian affirmation.[73]

Things changed dramatically from around the turn of the century with the development of lower-caste agitations, stimulated, significantly though not solely, by colonial policies like Census efforts to determine social precedence (1901), or Gait's abortive Circular in July 1910. The latter suggested an exclusion from the 'Hindu' category of those not allowed entry into temples and Brahman services, or considered polluting by touch or proximity. Two kinds of high-caste responses need to be distinguished here.

The first was a more aggressive assertion of hierarchy or adhikari-bheda, and specifically of the need for Brahman hegemony, set in a cultural-nationalist context in which caste was presented as a way of maintaining order and stability that was superior to Western statism, individual rights, and class conflict. I have elsewhere given instances of such attitudes from the writings of a Bengali adherent of Positivism engaged in developing a highly conservative and Brahmanical reading of Comte, and from the pages of a journal very influential in Swadeshi days, Satish Mukherjee's *Dawn*. Thus, already by 1900, the Positivist Jogendrachandra Ghosh was fearful of a 'dangerous upheaval from the lower depths of Hindu society'. In August 1903 *Dawn* argued that 'in all ages and by virtue of a law of nature, there shall be inequalities and distinctions between man and man.'[74] Less sophisticated versions of similar values were expressed at the Brahman Sabha meeting held in Calcutta in March 1911 with the specific objective of refuting Kayastha claims to twice-born status, and in a spate of high-caste tracts written by obscure Brahmans from small towns or villages. In the latter, not unexpectedly, the old kinds of textual arguments based on the *Purusha-sukta* and Manu's theory of varnasankara still often retained a prominent place.[75]

The second, apparently opposite, trend tried to develop an alternative self-image of upper-caste leadership, formulated in terms of paternalist philanthropy and sanskritising reform-from the-top that would 'uplift' or 'purify' lower castes and so build 'Hindu' and/or 'national' unity. P.K. Datta has established the centrality here of U.N. Mukherji and his extremely influential series of articles in the *Bengalee*

entitled *Hindus: A Dying Race* (1–22 June 1909).[76] The articles began with some Census data and projections from 1891 onwards that seemed to indicate a relative decline in the proportion of Hindus to Muslims in Bengal, attributed this to the wretched conditions of lower castes as contrasted to the supposedly more virile, energetic, and prosperous Muslim peasants, and urged paternalistic upliftment at Brahmanical initiative as the means to Hindu survival, unity, and rejuvenation. Social reform was thus given a new, caste focus, but simultaneously sought to be appropriated to a vision of ineluctable biological rivalry between Hindu and Muslim: a theme that, in changing forms, has remained central to Hindu chauvinist tendencies until today. Links are evident here with Census discourse and other colonial efforts at stimulating a divisive numbers game in the context of the beginnings of representative institutions.[77] But there was also an important class dimension, for Mukherji's articles coincided exactly with an essay in the *Modern Review* entitled 'What can be done for the Namasudras' by Binod Lal Ghosh, pleader from Madaripur, Faridpur district, suggesting a series of concrete ameliorative measures. These had become urgent, Ghosh argued, because some Namasudras 'egged on by their half-educated brethren' had started a 'mis-guided and suicidal agitation', cutting off connections with high castes and even ceasing to cultivate 'the lands of the higher class Hindu landlords as *burga* [sharecropping] tenants.'[78]

Binod Lal Ghosh's specific suggestions were confined to the starting of night schools, free dispensaries, and co-operative banks for Namasudras, along with a very limited change in modes of social intercourse extending to them the same status that the bhadralok granted to 'those non-Namasudras from whose hands the high-caste Hindu does not drink water'. In a curious mismatch between diagnosis and remedy, nothing further was said about agrarian relations. More generally, caste reform geared primarily to projects of Hindu unity was repeatedly undercut by persistent high-caste assumptions. What they did stimulate at times, however, were more determined efforts at caste uplift and self-organisation. Here a crucial link role was played by a

Brahman reformer undeservedly forgotten today, Digindranarayan Bhattacharya of Serajgunj, Pabna district, who had been hailed in his lifetime by a lower-caste activist (Manindranath Mandal, a Pod) as comparable to the Buddha, Chaitanya—and Muhammad.[79] Across three decades, Digindranarayan wrote copiously against caste, spoke frequently at lower-caste gatherings, and composed histories for them. His *Jatibheda* (1912) interestingly combined arguments drawn from Mukherji's *Dying Race* with Sibnath Shastri's more radical tract of 1884, and also launched a direct attack on adhikari-bheda couched in terms of what is recognisably a discourse of rights.[80] In his most radical phase, around the mid-1920s, Digindranarayan tried to bring together caste and gender reform. He passionately denounced the horrors of austere widowhood in terms reminiscent of Vidyasagar, and at the same time expressed his reservations about narrow, purely sanskritising movements both for being divisive and for imposing tighter restrictions on women in imitation of Brahmanical norms.[81] The anti-Muslim note remained muted in Digindranarayan, despite his being for some time an office bearer of the Hindu Mahasabha, and despite occasional mention in his writings of Mukherji's *Dying Race* motif of Hindu demographic decline. Unlike Mukherji, again, Digindranarayan encouraged Manindranath Mandal in his efforts to organise a joint front of lower-caste groups, the Bangiya Jana Sangh floated in 1923.[82]

But it is time to turn to the writings and initiatives of the lower castes themselves, approached through a selection of Namasudra texts.

IV

My sample consists of three kinds of writings. I look first at four tracts affirming Namasudra identity and developing claims to high status on the basis primarily of 'historical' arguments: these come closest to my theme as formulated in its title.[83] There is also an autobiographical text, written by a man claiming to be an untouchable *(patit)* activist of Namasudra origin,[84] and finally two long hagiographies in verse of Harichand and Guruchand 'Thakur' (Biswas), leaders of the Matua

religious sect which provided a core organisational and ideological focus for the Namasudra movement in the Faridpur-Khulna region.[85] It may be noted that while stylistically these lower-caste texts are not noticeably more colloquial or rustic than the average high-caste tract, they do tend to use much more verse.[86] The very high proportion of illiterates or neo-literates among groups like the Namasudras or the Rajbansis probably demanded a greater reliance on oral communication of texts and their retention through memory, which is of course always easier in verse.

Namasudrachar-Chandrika (June 1913), the briefest of these tracts, proceeds through a simple contrast of the description of Chandals given in the *Manusamhita* and other Sanskrit texts as executioners by profession obliged to reside away from all other people, and the evidently very different life of the Namasudras. The latter, the author argues, are actually descendants of a Brahman sage, Namas, son of Kashyap, who had legitimately married a Sudra woman. This inverted the ascription by Manu of origin through an illicit, degrading *pratiloma* relationship of a Brahman woman with a Sudra, while the Kashyap-Namas story is sought to be grounded in a passage in a Tantric text. Rashbihari Roy Pandit's 1909 tract, *Namasudra Darpan,* had already presented this origin myth in much greater detail. His account was based on a surprisingly knowledgeable appropriation of select Brahmanical texts—to which Roy Pandit added the rudiments of a historical narrative. Kashyap's descendants settled in an isolated part of south-central Bengal, started losing their Brahmanical ways because of their life in proximity with Chandals (giving up, for instance, the sacred thread as an inconvenience while hunting), and then got degraded through the machinations of Ballal Sen. The Namasudras, further, could not benefit from Muslim rule, unlike the educated Brahmans, Kayasthas, and Vaidyas, for they had become peasants who neglected education. Muslim rulers, too, had no interest in starting schools in villages—in sharp contrast to the British—and the pamphlet ends with a loyalist effusion replete with gratitude also for Christian missionaries.

Namasudra-Dwijatattva (April 1911) uses similar textual arguments to claim that Namasudras are 'pure Aryan Brahmans' unjustly deprived of that status by Ballal Sen, and ends with a call to take on the sacred thread once more. (None of the Bengal lower-caste tracts that I have seen, it may be mentioned here in parenthesis, claimed a non-Aryan heritage, unlike counterparts in other parts of the country like Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra: in that sense a complete break seems never to have been sought with sanskritisation.) But it also has occasional passages indicative of more radical, even rationalistic, moods. Textual exegesis, it suggests, has to be combined with reason, and so the theory of varnasankara, with its assumption of perfect knowledge of past illicit sexuality, is plainly ridiculous. The *Purusha-sukta* argument is also given an interesting twist: it states, after all, that even Sudras came from the body of the same Brahman. The initial division was in terms of occupation and function alone and did not imply hereditary inferiority. The subsequent degeneration was attributed in part to a kind of Brahman conspiracy at the time Buddhism was being suppressed, producing a system more cruel 'than anything in any other part of the world.' For—and here the author suddenly turns to verse—'The babus keep foreign dogs, eat and sleep with them/That doesn't take away the caste of a Hindu /But caste goes if he touches a Namasudra . . .'[87]

For Balaram Sarkar, the author of *Namasudra-Jnanabhandar* (May 1911), however, the question of Brahman origin is less important than education, with which is immediately associated a call for economic improvement through prudence, hard work, frugality, keeping away from idle amusements—a veritably puritanical programme, in fact. It is probably not a coincidence that this tract seems to have been written by a schoolteacher, and came out from Olpur village in Faridpur, the place of publication five years later of the metrical biography of Harichand Biswas, the founder of the Matua sect. The Matuas came in course of time to advocate a similar combination of learning with petty entrepreneurship. The Australian Baptist missionary Mead helped them to set up a high school at Orakandi, the home of the Biswas family, and their motto neatly combined a simple, non-ritualistic religious faith with economic enterprise: *'Haté kām mukhé nām',* doing worldly work

while chanting the holy name.[88] The pamphlet, unusually for a lower-caste tract, also contained a social reform strand. It condemned child marriage and advocated the remarriage of widows and education for women, all largely on the grounds of producing healthy, well-trained children for the community.[89]

All four tracts have 'Namasudra' in their titles, and, despite evident differences in emphasis and argument, they share a common assumption—or project—of caste identity. The term, in contrast, is not particularly common in the other three writings in my sample. In them, identity repeatedly gets diffused in often contradictory directions. There is the communion of a dissident sect in the first Matua text; a solidarity of the poor and underprivileged against their superiors, occasionally in all three but most of all in parts of *Patit Jatir Karmi;* satisfaction and pride flowing from achieved entry (for the author and some associates, though clearly not for the bulk of his intended audience) into the ranks of the respectable, paradoxically quite obvious in other passages of that same autobiography; and traces of a passage from initial heterodoxy to growing conformity with high-Hindu practices and politics, which become evident if the two verse hagiographies are compared with each other.

Haridas Palit—a pseudonym, we are told[90]—introduces himself at the beginning of his *Bangiya Patit Jatir Karmi* (1915) as 'a Hindu, by jati a Namasudra': and that is virtually the only reference to his specific caste identity in the book.[91] Palit is interested not, like the tract writers, in inventing a Namasudra history as a way of affirming higher status for a specific caste, but in a personal narrative of successful upward mobility which he tries to extend to those around him, and projects as a model for the poor and socially despised. He had started life in a Burdwan (West Bengal) village working, like his mother and sister, as a servant in the house of an upper-caste master. Conditions had been bad, with frequent insults, beatings, and a general treatment of his community as untouchables. Life there had been much worse, it appears, than in the Faridpur—Bakargunj region which constituted the heart of the Namasudra movement, for in West Bengal they were a

small minority—bonded servants and sharecroppers—rather than a big chunk of the Hindu landholding peasantry.[92] There are passages, however, where the author derives some pride and confidence from his recollections of an early life of manual labour. For through making lower castes do all the work, the bhadralok have become parasites, hopelessly dependent really on them. There is, he hints, a potential for a kind of inversion here, through the skills and capabilities developed through subordination.

From such abject beginnings, the author tells us with much pride, he has risen to become a successful lawyer, landlord, District Board Chairman.[93] This success he attributes above all to the guidance of an uncle, who gave Haridas's family shelter when famine drove them out of their village to Hooghly district with its many jute mills. The uncle had worked as a jute millhand, saved up much of his wages instead of wasting them, like most fellow-workers, on drink and occasional luxuries, and gradually bought some land, with which he combined some small-trading activities—and Haridas became his assistant. To this theme of improvement through petty commodity production is quickly added education. Education of a specific kind, however, the book repeatedly emphasises, quite different from the upper-caste bhadralok habit of using degrees just to get clerical jobs in offices, for that would be only another kind of *gholami*.[94] Lower castes taking to education must not cut themselves off from, or begin to despise, productive manual work—which is identified primarily with peasant agriculture, as contrasted to the dependence of wage-labour in factories. Thanks to his uncle, Haridas got himself a good education, in course of which he made friends with a number of upper-caste classmates. The benevolent landlord-father of one of them became his second patron. The book ends, in a mixture perhaps of a bit of reality and much utopian imagination, with Haridas and his friends setting up a chain of night schools for labouring groups in the Burdwan countryside, along with co-operative stores and other improvement projects—and the combination of education and entrepreneurship allegedly creates a general collective atmosphere of improvement, the benefits of which are

shared by a wide variety of lower-caste groups, even some Santal tribals and Christians. The more selfish of the bhadralok are upset, however, for they see small business and trade passing into the hands of lower castes and Muslims, and find it difficult to get servants: for them, it is the Kaliyuga, the inversion of right order.

The combination of economic improvement with education which is Palit's panacea has affinities with parts of the Matua creed, but otherwise *Patit Jatir Karmi,* like the four other tracts examined so far, is an entirely secular text that makes no reference to that religious sect. Conversely, the verse biography of the Matua founder Harichand (1811–78), composed by the village poet Tarakchandra Sarkar and published, we are told, only after much delay due to lack of funds in 1916,[95] has little to say about specifically Namasudra caste aspirations. It emphasises, rather, a devotional communion of song *(kirtan),* ecstatic dance, and miraculous healing across caste, gender, even occasionally Hindu–Muslim divides, in the spirit of much medieval bhakti. The text tries to follow the format of the epics and medieval *mangalkavyas*, with many repetitions and numerous digressions into subsidiary tales, mostly dealing with the miraculous achievements of Harichand and some of his disciples. Taking up what is quite a standard Vaishnava theme—that Kali-yuga despite its evils was also blessed, for in it the humble could attain salvation easily through devotion alone—*Harileelamrita* goes on to add an interesting gloss further privileging the underprivileged. Vishnu is incarnating himself lower and lower down the social scale: from Ram the Kshatriya through Krishna reared in a 'Gop' (Vaishya) family down to today's avatar, the Namasudra Harichand. Strikingly, the Buddha is described as predicting Harichand's advent, while there is also a reference to 'the Yavana [Muslim] weaver Kuber [Kabir], a great devotee of Ram.'[96] More concrete hints about power relations are not entirely absent. Thus Harichand's family had had to leave their home village of Safala due to a quarrel in which his brothers beat up a wicked official of the local Brahman zamindar. This was not quite a landlord—peasant clash, however, for the fight had been about that *gomastha* official reneging on a loan he had taken from Harichand's elder brother. An entrepreneurial

streak is therefore present from the beginning, with Hari Thakur miraculously producing double crops on his land, starting an oil shop, turning to trade and teaching disciples to do the same.[97] But repeatedly the references to an improvement ethic get swamped by tales of miraculous healing (in return for which Harichand gets gifts of rice and money), while to the occasionally mentioned formula of *'haté kām mukhé nām'* is often attached the tag *'bhakti-ee prabal'* (devotion is mighty) which seems to have been dropped later on. What is totally absent are references to education, jobs, missionary contacts, Census status—the staple of much Namasudra politics from *c.* 1900 onwards—and this though the text was published in 1916.

With Mahananda Haldar's 600-page biography in verse of Harichand's son, Guruchand Thakur (1847—1937), we are clearly in a different world, indicating transformations within the Matua sect and the Namasudra movement alike. The author had been a lawyer at Bagerhat (Khulna), and the book's copyright-holder was Guruchand's grandson P.R.Thakur, who had a British barrister's degree and was successively member of the Bengal legislature and the Constituent Assembly of independent India. Publication costs had been met by a Matua Mahasangh, and a long prose preface laid much emphasis on Namasudra identity and history.[98] Sect and caste movements alike have acquired far more crystallised forms now, but simultaneously they have become, in significant part, instruments in the very successful upward mobility of a family and its entourage.

Stylistically the traditional format is still sought to be retained, with much repetition—almost cyclicity—and there is at times a self-conscious archaism, as when the Baptist missionary Mead is called *rajpurohit* (royal priest), or in descriptions of meetings of Guruchand with high British officials that read like accounts of princely darbars in epics. But the basic order is chronological, with precise dates given for important events in Namasudra history. For some of these, in fact, like the first Namasudra assembly around 1880 in Dattadanga (Khulna), and the contacts of Guruchand with Mead concerning the setting up of

a high English school at Orakandi in 1908 and subsequent Census petitions, the text is the principal and at times the only source.

Miracle tales and accounts of ecstatic devotion are rare in this text, in sharp contrast to the biography of Harichand. His son, we are told, was firmly opposed to piety detached from work. The basic stress on householder devotion, *grihastha sanyas*, as opposed to otherworldly renunciation, is a common bhakti theme, but to this has been added an insistence on improvement almost reminiscent of the Puritan ethic. Predictably, this finds principal expression in the twin fields of economic enterprise and education. In both, as with Haridas Palit, 'modernity' displays somewhat paradoxical consequences. It has clarified awareness of exploitative relations of caste and class,[99] and simultaneously instrumentalised that awareness into a project of upward mobility of a small part of the community—for individualistic improvement, in conditions of extremely meagre resources, tends always to be highly divisive. Thus there is a whole section on the entrepreneurial activities of Guruchand from the late 1860s onwards, through entering very successfully the riverine trade of the Orakandi region in rice, jute, and mustard seeds, as well as by giving loans to poorer peasants. He urged his followers to adopt similar ways, and we are assured that Guruchand's loans did not really amount to the usual kind of oppressive moneylending: and yet land accumulated in his hands, for he generously cancelled the debts of those who surrendered their lands to him![100]

Both class awareness and its manipulation are clearest in the section on Guruchand's educational efforts. The rationale suggested for Namasudra education is interestingly different from what we know about the motivations animating the efforts of bhadralok men or women. Not jobs, or non-utilitarian broadening of mental horizons, but mitigation of class tyranny is foregrounded in this section, for the landlord and moneylender constantly trick the illiterate peasant in everyday matters of rent or debt-payment receipts. The Kayasthas opposed the proposal of a benevolent bhadralok to start a high school in a Namasudra village, for they were afraid their sharecroppers and

servants would no longer work for them if they became educated. That, they are reported as arguing, would disrupt the age-old principles of adhikari-bheda, as enshrined notably in the *Ramayana.* The biography explains that it was such bhadralok hostility that made Guruchand accept the help of Mead's Baptist Mission, and it is also very careful to emphasise that the motives were entirely pragmatic—to get financial help for the school and also obtain access to British officials: there was never any desire to become Christians. And yet the detailed exposure of class oppression culminates in a section, grandiloquently entitled *Namasudra Jagaran, 1907* (Namasudra Awakening), where all that happens is that through Mead's intercession some relatives of Guruchand, and a few others, manage to get minor administrative posts.[101] *Guruchand-Charit,* a hagiography unusually detailed and precise about numerous events far removed from the conventionally 'religious', remains totally silent about the Namasudra sharecropper withdrawal of services around 1907–9 in the Gournadi region of Bakargunj (quite close to the Matua heartland of Gopalganj) that had alarmed Binod Lal Ghosh.[102] Like the earlier movement of 1872–3, this found no mention in any other Namasudra tract either, so far as I know. And towards the end of *Guruchand-Charit,* Guruchand is quoted as stating with engaging frankness that it was sufficient if some Namasudras get jobs: the rest should presumably remain content with their life as toilers.[103]

It is in such—ultimately, class—terms that it seems most plausible to contextualise the increasing strength of what Sekhar Bandyopadhyay has termed 'accommodative' tendencies among the Namasudras, and indeed very many other caste movements. The pattern involved also the growing acceptance of high-Hindu divinities and rituals, a sharper stress on the seclusion and subordination of women, and the entry of an apologetic undertone into accounts of continued Namasudra self-distancing from bhadralok-led anti-colonial nationalism. Thus the closing sections of *Guruchand-Charit* include a description of the entry of first Durga and later Kali worship among the Matuas. A concluding summary of Matua teachings insists on keeping women secluded and

wives always obeying and worshipping their husbands.[104] It has to be added that there had been strong indications of patriarchal values right from the beginning of the Namasudra upthrust. The seclusion of women was an important element in the social boycott of high castes even in 1873, and Guruchand had insisted on it at the Dattadanga conference in 1880.[105]

But assumptions of a seamless transition from 'alienation to integration' will not really do, for implicit in some passages of this text, as well as in its silences, are numerous indications of tensions.[106] Several times Guruchand is depicted violently abusing his followers, as for instance when many of them got swayed initially by Swadeshi propaganda in 1905. There is also a hint about the leader getting rather distanced from even close followers, and some resentment on that score.[107] Even the insistence on patriarchal values may not be as simple or automatic as it might seem. Child marriage was discouraged, and even widow remarriage actively debated, in 1907 and again at the 1923 conference, which actually split partly on the latter issue. *Guruchand-Charit* remains a little coy about details in these matters, and offers no explanation as to why and how widow-remarriage had become such a vital issue: yet another revealing silence. Repeated discussions surely indicate both tension spots and possibilities of argumentation that would have been absent earlier.[108]

The Namasudra texts that I have seen were all written by men, as were the overwhelming majority of available tracts brought out by or on behalf of other subordinate-caste movements. But the point regarding shifts and tensions is amply confirmed and extended by *Mahishya-Mahila,* a bi-monthly journal edited by a woman (Krishnabhabini Biswas) for women of the upwardly mobile Mahishya community. The first number, dated July 1911, appears firmly conformist, with Mahishya women asked to remain (or become) house-bound, and contribute to the cause of their menfolk through prayers alone. There was a need to educate girls in childhood, but solely in order to produce good wives and mothers, and a poem by Giribala Dei urged Mahishya women to be worthy of their lofty Aryan birth by always obeying the commands of

husbands, parents-in-law, and all elders. An article by the same Giribala in a later issue of the journal in early 1914, however, appears significantly different. Two Calcutta girls had just burnt themselves to death, realising that their parents did not have the dowry money to get them husbands, and many had hailed this immolation as worthy of comparison with the *jauhar-vrata* by wives of medieval Rajput warriors. Giribala lashed out at the crassness of such 'greedy, devilish men', and pertinently reminded readers that neither Sabitri nor Sakuntala had thought of committing suicide. Articles and poems redolent of patriarchy remained abundant in the later numbers of *Mahishya Mahila,* but alternative voices kept surfacing: as when in early 1915 a piece entitled *Streer Patra* (A Wife's Letter) detailed the sorrows of an oppressed and neglected wife whose husband had married a second time.[109]

Maybe the point I have been trying to make about textual fissures and silences can be sharpened by a coincidence of dates: 1943, the date of publication of *Guruchand-Charit,* was also the year of the Bengal Famine. This virtually shattered the Namasudra small-peasant economy in districts like Faridpur and Bakargunj, which along with some adjoining areas had constituted the heart of their caste movement. Yet Namasudra assembly members remained supporters of the Muslim League ministry, and Mukunda Behari Mullick, one of the most prominent of their political leaders from *c.* 1912 onwards, played down the devastating effects of this awesome human tragedy. He even supported the very unpopular and disastrous government decision to hand over sole procurement of foodgrains to the notoriously profiteering Ispahani business house.[110]

V

Let me end by touching on a wider theme. It seems to me that the data and argument I have been presenting can help to problematise a little the current worldwide swing away from class analysis towards valorisations of identity politics. The first is often assumed today to be always incorrigibly economistic and reductionist; the second gets

formulated overwhelmingly in terms of cultural 'authenticity'. A politics of 'recognition' of subordinated identities gets pitted against what are thought to be the dangerously homogenising implications of modern-Western post-Enlightenment rationality and universalist equal rights, as embodied in liberalism and Marxism alike.

There is no doubt at all that earlier approaches had numerous blind spots: most obviously, for Left-inclined Indian politics and historiography, the virtual silence till quite recently, on caste. I need go no further in search of a telling example than an instance from my own earlier research. Working on caste in early-twentieth-century Bengal, I have had to go back to the literature of vernacular tracts that had constituted one major kind of material for my first research project, on the Swadeshi era. I feel astounded today that I had virtually ignored caste tracts and movements. And yet I often wonder whether, today, other kinds of silences are not becoming quite as disabling.

I have argued elsewhere that the assumption of a total disjunction between the 'domains' of power and autonomy or resistance fits in well with culturalist conceptions of pure or authentic identity.[111] Much in the later trajectory of Subaltern Studies becomes explicable in the light of that affinity. There is also a strong tendency to collapse the cultural into the religious in the search for the authentic autonomy of the non-West or non-modern. For Partha Chatterjee, therefore, the interesting but extremely marginal story of the Balarami oppositional religious sect becomes the empirical core of the study of 'the nation and its outcastes'.[112]

Neither of these two assumptions, of dichotomous power/autonomy and the centrality of alternative forms of religious life in subaltern-caste protest, fits the early-twentieth-century Bengal material. Subordinate castes were quite often oppositional, but hardly ever autonomous in the sense of being free from high-caste religious, social, and historical assumptions. The pattern, we have seen, was neither total integration nor the building up of a distinct domain, but marked by complicated, shifting, and selective appropriations. As for religion, the Namasudras appear almost unique among Bengal lower-caste formations in

developing their movement around a dissident religious sect. But even in their case, I have suggested, one has to be wary about exaggerating the centrality of the Matuas. The overlap between heterodox religious sect and Namasudra caste affirmation was real but far from exact. The five Namasudra tracts in my sample that are not hagiographies do not mention the Matuas, while the biography of the Matua founder says very little about caste identity.

Over time, the Matuas lost much of their anti-orthodox edge, and sections of Namasudra and many other lower-caste movements could on occasion develop links with chauvinistic high-caste-led formations like the Hindu Mahasabha. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay's study reveals shifting patterns of relationships, including several major riots, between Namasudras and Muslims. There are hints, in many cases perhaps unrecoverable in any detail, of moments when gender tensions sought expression, as we saw in some issues of *Mahishya Mahila*. And Bandyopadhyay has amassed considerable evidence that Namasudra peasant and sharecropper mobilisation was far from developing only around caste identity. Periodic agrarian struggles—consistently ignored by Namasudra tracts and caste organisations, as we have seen—included the movements of 1872–3 and 1907–9, as well as the combination in 1928–9 of Namasudra and Muslim sharecroppers demanding two-thirds share of the crop. This *tebhaga* demand was generalised into a powerful movement under Communist and Kisan Sabha leadership in 1946–7, primarily among the Rajbansis of North Bengal, where the long-established caste organisation found itself completely sidelined by this explicitly class-grounded upsurge, but also in some Namasudra-dominated areas in Faridpur, Bakargunj, Khulna, Jessore, and Dacca.[113]

Clearly, studies of caste identities in isolation will not do. We need to avoid essentialisms not only of class, but also of caste. Class struggle and identity politics both have to be conceptualised not as given or inevitable constants, but as no more than constructed, contingent projects playing on specific kinds of pressures and tensions in varying ways and magnitudes. But I have some problems with eclectic

approaches which merely emphasise oscillations in relative importance, and which in effect look upon class as just another kind of identity, remaining satisfied with a model of fleeting solidarities all more or less on the same level of importance. As projects, one needs also some evaluation in terms of potential implications. Here, the original Marxian project had visualised the proletariat as a very distinct kind of social group, as the potentially 'universal' class, the identity of which has to be simultaneously affirmed and ultimately transcended through a politics of hegemony. Lower-caste politics in sharp contrast has been quite remarkably fragmented, as Digindranarayan angrily emphasised in a mid-1920s pamphlet: Namasudras look down upon the Chandals, Mahishyas distinguish themselves from the Kaibartas, the Rajbansis say they are utterly distinct from the Koch, and so it went on, he complains.[114] Of course, similar things happen in class movements, too, and Marx's faith in the potentialities of the working class would appear highly utopian to very many today. The point, rather, is that the contemporary theoretical emphasis on identity and authenticity, and above all the widespread rejection of any and every potentially universalist values and projects, tend to erect a major problem into an ideal.

11

Analysing and Ethnicizing Caste to Eradicate it More Effectively*

CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT

> 'I thought for long that we could rid the Hindu society of its evils and get the Depressed Classes incorporated into it on terms of equality. That motive inspired the Mahad Chaudar Tank Satyagraha and the Nasik Temple Entry Satyagraha. With that object in mind we burned the Manu Smriti and performed mass thread ceremonies. Experience has taught me better. I stand today absolutely convinced that for the Depressed Classes there can be no equality among the Hindus because on inequality rest the foundations of Hinduism. We no longer want to be part of the Hindu society.' (Speech by Ambedkar reported in *The Bombay Sentinel,* 28 April 1942 *[Source Material on Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar and the Movement of Untouchables,* vol. 1, Bombay, Govt of Maharashtra, 1982, p. 250])

Ambedkar was a scholar as much as a man of action and he analysed Hindu society *before* embarking on his struggle against the caste system. His intellectual training, which reflected an intense personal thirst for knowledge that stayed with him throughout his life, naturally predisposed him for such a role. From his travels he brought back hundreds of books which he drew on

as sources for the innumerable quotations which punctuate his writings. A prolific author, he always had several manuscripts in various stages of preparation, not to mention the hundreds of newspaper articles he penned.

Ambedkar began investigating the origins of the caste system more than a decade before Govind Sadashiv Ghurye—the first Indian anthropologist to do so, whose *Caste and Race in India* was published in 1932. Yet his contribution to Indian sociology was overlooked for many years, as Olivier Herrenschmidt emphasizes as a prelude to his own efforts to redress this imbalance.[1] The founding fathers of Indian anthropology, such as M.N. Srinivas and Louis Dumont, and most of their heirs, have ignored Ambedkar, even though he anticipated many of their arguments.[2] This is all the more surprising given that with the exception of a few texts which remained unavailable till the Government of Maharashtra reprinted them in the late 1980s and early '90s as part of the publication of Ambedkar's complete works to celebrate his centenary,[3] most of his writings were published and republished in his lifetime, beginning with his first article 'Castes in India, Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development' (1917) to the final one, 'The Buddha and his Dhamma' (1957), which appeared posthumously, passing via undoubtedly the best known of all, but very rarely quoted, Annihilation of Caste' (1936).

In these and other writings Ambedkar strove hard to demonstrate the mechanisms of the caste system and to identify the origins of untouchability in order to advance his fight for equality.

Ambedkar the Sociologist

At the age of 25 Ambedkar's career as a sociologist of caste began when he attended A.A. Goldenweiser's seminar at Columbia. In May 1916 he gave a lecture that was published the following year in *Indian Antiquary* as 'Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development', in which he claimed 'to advance a theory of caste'.[4] He was still searching for an overarching explanatory model, but his insights, although

occasionally rudimentary, were perceptive, owing much to intuition. Ambedkar thus confronted head-on Western authors whose explanation of caste rested on theories of racial difference, namely that an Aryan 'invasion' had subjugated the Dravidians, thus relegating them to the ranks of the lower castes. For Ambedkar, such Western writers opted for race as the root cause of the 'problem of caste' because they were 'themselves impregnated by colour prejudices'.[5] But they could not have been more wrong, he argued, for caste is a social phenomenon, not a racial one.

Endogamy was the main springboard of caste, and the caste system, according to Ambedkar, crystallized after the Brahmins turned inwards, henceforth refusing all matrimonial unions save those among their own community. This is why Ambedkar defined caste as a 'closed class'.[6] He extrapolated from this phenomenon that sati and bans on widow remarriage were both mechanisms designed 'to mop up' surplus women —who otherwise would have had to marry outside their caste—as was the marriage of pre-pubescent girls, since it allowed widowers to find a wife from among their own caste.

Such rather implausible reasoning went hand in hand with flashes of real genius. He argued, for instance, that the caste system was not imposed on society by Brahmins; instead it evolved because Brahmins were *imitated* by other social groups which, for example also opted for endogamy. Here Ambedkar draw his inspiration from Gabriel Tarde who characterized social imitation by two principles: it is the subordinate who imitates the superior, never the opposite; and the greater the social distance between the two groups, the more intense the effort at imitation. For Ambedkar, notions of caste spread through society via these two precepts, which were all the more powerful as Brahmins enjoyed an almost sacred position. This emulation process also explains why other castes began to practise sati, child marriage, or bans on widow-remarriage. In so doing, Ambedkar advanced the basis of one of the most heuristic of concepts in modern Indian studies—the 'Sanskritization' process—that M.N. Srinivas was to introduce forty years later.[7] While the term was coined by Srinivas, the process itself

had been described by colonial administrators such as E.T. Atkinson in his *Himalayana Gazetteer* and by Alfred Lyall, in whose works Ambedkar might well have encountered it.[8]

Beyond this, Ambedkar blamed other Western authors—from Emile Senart to H.H. Risley and including J.C. Nesfield and Denzil Ibbetson—for having defined 'caste as a unit by itself and not as one within a System of castes.'[9] Castes form a system, and that is why, in Ambedkar's theory, Brahmins are the object of imitation by other groups. He emphasized that India's remarkable homogeneity ('there is no country that can rival the Indian Peninsula with respect to the unity of its culture'[10]) derives from the caste system because Brahmins are present throughout the subcontinent. As mentioned above, Ambedkar recognized that Brahmins could not have *imposed* the caste system;[11] instead he contended that this type of social organization came about by virtue of a belief in the superiority of the Brahmin and of the acquiescence by other castes of their own inferiority.[12] This analysis anticipated not only that of Srinivas but also Dumont's interpretation of the 'holistic' character of the caste system: castes do not exist independently of each other but form a system. The acid test, here, lies in the lower castes' internalization of hierarchy, which is borne out by the fact that the Brahminical value system was universally recognized as superior. The concept of Sanskritization partly proceeds from this idea.[13] Dumont perceived this arrangement in an almost organicist perspective, as exemplified by the following metaphor: The caste isolates itself by submission to the whole, just as an arm which would prefer not to marry its cells to those of the stomach.'[14] In his view the caste system is virtually harmonious, with its constituent parts fulfilling complementary functions. Dumont does not ignore hierarchy but apparently absolves it from the function of domination, even social oppression, that Ambedkar regarded with such a deep sense of revolt.

In the mature writings, and in particular in *Who were the Shudras?* (1947), Ambedkar conducted a detailed re-examination of the foundational beliefs of the caste system. He applied his mind

systematically and logically to the Vedic texts, and in particular to the *Rig Veda,* where he finds a myth of origin explaining the genesis of caste, the *Purusha Shukta.* This myth presents the birth of human society as proceeding from the sacrificial dismemberment of the primordial man, the Virat Purusha. The key strophe of the *Purusha Shukta* says: 'His mouth became the Brahmin/ the Warrior [Kshatriya] was the product of his arms/ His thighs were the Artisan [Vaishya]/ From his feet were born the Servant [Shudras].'[15]

Ambedkar emphasizes that, in contrast with the Old Testament notion of 'Genesis', this cosmology puts not man but the group at the origin of society: 'It preaches a class-composed society as its ideal.'[16] Above all, he regards *varnas* as complementary and therefore a means of helping society to 'function'. Such a view of society as essentially conflict-free was naturally of Brahminical origin: the authors of this cosmogony, as of all Sanskrit literature codifying social relations, were Brahmins. The *varna* system owes to them its religious sanctions. And Ambedkar rebelled against this scheme which 'not only regards class composition as natural and ideal, but also regards it as sacred and divine.'[17] He also denounced the organicist logic which underlies the *Purusha Shukta:*

> The equation of the different classes to different parts of the body is not a matter of accident. It is deliberate. The idea behind this plan seems to be to discover a formula which will solve two problems, one of fixing the functions of the four classes and the other of fixing the gradation of the four classes after a preconceived plan. The formula of equating different classes to the different parts of the body of the Creator has this advantage. The part fixes the gradation of the class and the gradation in its turn fixes the function of the class. The Brahmin is equated to the mouth of the Creator. Mouth being the noblest part of the anatomy, the Brahmin becomes the noblest of the four classes. As he is the noblest of the scale, he is given the noblest function, that of custodian of knowledge and learning. The Kshatriya is equated to the arms of the Creator. Among the limbs of a person, arms are next below the

> mouth. Consequently, the Kshatriya is given an order of precedence next below the Brahmins and is given a function which is second only to knowledge, namely, fighting. The Vaishya is equated to the thighs of the Creator. In the gradation of limbs, the thighs are next below the arms. Consequently, the Vaishya is given an order of precedence next below the Kshatriya and is assigned a function of industry and trade which in name and fame ranks or rather did rank in ancient times below that of a warrior. The Shudra is equated to the feet of the Creator. The feet form the lowest and the most ignoble part of the human frame. Accordingly, the Shudra is placed last in the social order and is given the filthiest function, namely to serve as a menial.[18]

For Ambedkar the *Purusha Shukta* establishes a completely unique social system because 'no society has an official gradation laid down, fixed and permanent, with an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt.'[19] The specificity of the system is indeed held together by this 'graded inequality' to which Ambedkar was to return many times in his writings and speeches, as emphasized by Olivier Herrenschmidt. In his last book he mentions 'an ascending scale of hatred and a downward scale of contempt [which] indeed could well be a perpetual source of conflict.'[20] The replacement of the words 'reverence/contempt by 'hatred/contempt' reveals a shift: one element of the holistic logic of the system—respect for superiors—is downplayed in favour of a more spontaneous feeling in the heart of Ambedkar: hatred of the oppressor.

The notion of 'graded inequality' was indeed Ambedkar's main sociological finding.[21] The President of the Indian Republic in 1997—2002, K.R. Narayanan, a Dalit member of the Congress party who has nonetheless read Ambedkar, implicitly acknowledged this fact when he recalled Ambedkar's adage regarding the caste system: 'A progressive order of reverence and a graded order of contempt.'[22] For Ambedkar, this order possesses a strong resilience to social change: if the lower castes are not in a position to overthrow their oppressors, it is not only

because they have partially internalized hierarchy but also because of the very characteristics of 'graded inequality'.

'Graded Inequality', the Key Element of the Caste System

Ambedkar was an ardent activist of social equality of which he learnt the philosophical roots in the West where he appreciated its benefits in practical terms. For him, all the values of the Republic and the French Revolution ensue from it:

> Fraternity and liberty are really derivative notions. The basic and fundamental conceptions are equality and respect for human personality. Fraternity and liberty take their roots in these two fundamental conceptions. Digging further down, it may be said that equality is the original notion and respect for human personality is a reflection of it. So that where equality is denied, everything else may be taken to be denied.[23]

His defence of French or American egalitarianism naturally goes hand in hand with an ardent individualism—which can be seen in his own personal itinerary. But it was also reflected in his criticism of a social institution—the caste system—which denies any individual identity to a human being, while considering only his birth group. However, Ambedkar does not content himself with contrasting individualistic societies with so-called holistic societies and equality with inequality. He distinguishes traditional inequality from graded inequality which, according to him, is at least twice as dangerous.[24] The notion of inequality includes a social condition where influential groups confront each other; in industrial societies the working class can struggle against the bourgeoisie. In the *ancien regime*, the Third Estate was able to raise itself against the aristocracy and the King. Ambedkar explains that the type of inequality from which caste-ridden society suffers is of a different kind altogether because its logic also divides the dominated groups, preventing them from uniting to overthrow the oppressor:

> In a system of graded inequality, the aggrieved parties are not on a common level. This can happen only when they are only high and low. In a system of graded inequality there are the highest (the Brahmins). Below the highest are the higher (the Kshatriyas). Below the higher are those who are high ([the] Vaishya[s]). Below the high are the low ([the] Shudra [s]) and below the low are those who are lower (the Untouchables). All have a grievance against the highest and would like to bring about their downfall. But they will not combine. The higher is anxious to get rid of the highest but does not wish to combine with the high, the low and the lower lest they should reach his level and be his equal. The high wants to over-throw the higher that is above him but does not want to join hands with the low and the lower, lest they should rise to his status and become equal to him in rank. The low is anxious to pull down the highest, the higher and the high but he would not make a common cause with the lower for fear of the lower gaining a higher status and becoming his equal. In the system of graded inequality there is no such class as completely unprivileged class except the one which is at the base of the social pyramid. The privileges of the rest are graded. Even the low is a privileged class as compared with the lower. Each class being privileged, every class is interested in maintaining the system.[25]

Ambedkar exposes here one of the most powerful mechanisms of the caste system but he does not take his argument to its logical conclusion because he considers only the *varnas,* as if they constituted social entities. If this were the case, the highest castes would have been easily marginalized by the Shudras who represent more than half of the Hindu population, as the British census showed. In fact the mechanisms which he describes here are reproduced at the level of *jatis* because every *varna* gets subdivided into multiple *jatis* whose hierarchy also rests on a gradation of status. A strictly vegetarian Brahmin caste could thereby rise above those who consume eggs or fish. This differentiation process may even operate *within jatis*. For instance, a section of the barbers' caste whose wives renounced midwifery—a renowned polluting practice—would rise above those who continue to practise this vocation, thereby gradually creating a new endogamous

caste according to the schismatic principle.[26] Indian society here manifests, according to Herrenschmidt, an 'obsession [with] small differences',[27] especially at the lowest levels of the social scale, where each individual feels the need, more than elsewhere, for someone lower in status than himself.

Ambedkar was the first to underline this reality and to deplore the divisions among the Untouchables who were, in his opinion, 'a disunited body [. . .] infested with the caste system in which they believe as much as does the high caste Hindu. This caste system among the Untouchables has given rise to mutual rivalry and to jealousy and it has made common action impossible.'[28] Giving evidence to the Simon Commission on 23 October 1928, he stated with some bitterness that 'the caste Hindus have spread their poison to the rest.'[29] He was especially disturbed by the fact that in Maharashtra Mahars and Mangs did not marry among themselves. Moreover, he failed to project himself as the representative of non-Mahar Dalits: neither Mangs nor Chambhars were to join his political party in large numbers, hence confirming Ambedkar's view of the caste system: that it incorporated and institutionalized its own mechanisms of self-preservation.

To sum up, Ambedkar advanced a theory of caste which anticipated many dimensions of current anthropology. Castes exist only by forming a system; Brahmin values overdetermine what is right for the lower castes, and the overpowering proof of this 'holism' lies in the Sanskritization process; and last, but not least, the hierarchy of caste reflects a very specific logic of graded inequality which prevents those most discriminated against from forming social coalitions against elite groups. For Herrenschmidt, it was the main reason why 'this society was incapable not only of revolution but more simply of reform.'[30] Yet through his analysis of the origins and mechanisms of caste, Ambedkar wished above all to facilitate this revolution by endowing the lowest castes with a distinct and prestigious identity.

Inventing a Golden Age for the Lower Castes: The Prestige of Autochthony

It was not merely intellectual curiosity that led Ambedkar closely to analyse the mechanisms of the caste system: above all he wanted to understand it better to fight the oppression of millions of Shudras and Untouchables. His analysis was but the first stage of an ideological counter-offensive in which he sought to endow Untouchables with a glorious past and a prestigious identity through which they could regain their self-respect and overcome their divisions.

Shudras, Heirs of the Kshatriyas, or the Deep Roots of Sanskritization

Ambedkar tried first to establish a Shudra genealogy, of which the most celebrated conclusions were published in 1947 in *Who were the Shudras*? In his familiar style he began by attacking Western theories of an Aryan invasion,[31] maintaining, on the basis of English translations of the *Dharma Shastras*, that the Shudras were Aryans and therefore belonged to the three 'superior' *varnas*. He finds some proof of this in a detailed analysis of the Laws of Manu by the Sanskritist Dr George Buhler, according to whom—in the Vedic era—a Shudra could become a Brahmin in the seventh generation if his ancestors had married only Brahmins.[32] Moreover these Shudras also participated in the coronation ceremonies of kings,[33] and according to ancient texts were often wealthy in their own right.[34]

It then remained to be determined to which superior *varna* Shudras could have belonged. Ambedkar claims that they were Kshatriyas, and constituted a key sub-set of this *varna,* from which some of the most eminent and powerful kings of antiquity had supposedly emerged.[35] They allegedly belonged to the solar lineage *(suryavansh).*

Ambedkar based his theory on the hypothesis that there were, from the outset, only three *varnas* and consequently Shudras appeared on the scene only much later. He argued that this *varna* emerged after some

Kshatriyas had been demoted to this rank by Brahmins, who simply achieved their objective by refusing them *Upanayana*, a rite marked by the bestowing of the sacred thread to the sons of the three superior *varnas* which consecrated their passage to the order of the 'twice born'.[36] Their aim was to take revenge for the violence and humiliation imposed upon them by some other Kshatriyas.

Obviously Ambedkar had in mind the Brahmins' refusal to recognize Shivaji as a Kshatriya.[37] His theory, which is based on scant historical evidence, doubtless echoed this episode in Maharashtra's history, whereas in fact Shivaji, a Maratha-Kunbi, was a Shudra. Nevertheless, he had won power and so expected the Brahmins to confirm his new status by writing for him an adequate genealogy. This process recalls that of Sanskritization, but sociologists refer to such emulation of Kshatriyas by Shudras as 'Kshatriyaization' and describe it as a variant of Sanskritization. Unfortunately, it did not allow the Shudras to emancipate themselves from the caste system and its hierarchical structure. Hence, although he tried to endow Shudras with a prestigious history, Ambedkar here implies that they should regard themselves as constituents of a hierarchical society and hence imitate their superiors in order to regain their lost status. They could not, in such circumstances, claim a separate identity in order to facilitate their revolt against the caste system. Interestingly, he was to choose a very different approach in his study of the Untouchables' identity and history.

The Untouchables as Persecuted Buddhists

After the appearance of his book on the Shudras, the next year, 1948, Ambedkar published another one entitled *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They became Untouchables*? Once again he began by refuting the Western thesis linking caste to race;[38] he also rejected explanations based on professional specialization because 'the filthy and unclean occupations which the Untouchables perform are common to all human societies [. . .] Why were such people not treated as Untouchables in other parts of the world?'[39] Ambedkar's hypothesis is remarkably complex. He explains that all primitive societies have been

conquered at one time or another by invaders who set themselves above the autochthonous peoples. In the process of social fragmentation that followed, peripheral groups, or what he calls 'Broken Men', split off from the centre: 'In a tribal war it often happened that a tribe, instead of being completely annihilated, was defeated and routed. In many cases, a defeated tribe became broken into bits, As a consequence of this, there always existed in Primitive times a floating population consisting of groups of Broken tribesmen roaming in all directions.'[40]

When the conquerors became sedentary, they turned to these 'Broken Men' to protect them from the attacks of nomadic tribes. Ambedkar applied this theory by portraying Untouchables as the descendants of the Broken Men (or Dalit, in Marathi), and thus as the original, pre-Aryan, inhabitants of India. He clearly drew his inspiration from the Orientalist vulgate as propagated by the British, according to whom Mahars were autochthons *par excellence,* whose caste name found its way into that of the province of Maharashtra.[41] The notion that Untouchables were the primordial inhabitants of India had already been propagated by Gopalnak Vitthalnak Walangkar, a former soldier influenced by Phule who in 1886 had founded the first Mahar association,[42] the principal aim of which was to widen recruitment of his caste into the British army.

According to Ambedkar, whose first wife was related to Walangkar, these Broken Men were the most steadfast followers of the Buddha after he began preaching in the sixth century BC. And they remained Buddhists when the rest of society returned to the Hindu fold under Brahmin pressure. Ambedkar drew two conclusions from it: 'It explains why the Untouchables regard the Brahmins as inauspicious, do not employ them as their priests and do not even allow them to enter into their quarters. It also explains why the Broken Men came to be regarded us Untouchables. The Broken Men hated the Brahmins because the Brahmins were the enemies of Buddhism and the Brahmins imposed untouchability upon the Broken Men because they would not leave Buddhism.'[43]

For Ambedkar the association of Broken Men with Buddhism did not suffice as an explanation of why Brahmins had relegated the Untouchables. The supplementary reason that he put forward was related to their eating habits; the Broken Men refused to become vegetarian and continued to eat beef, whereas 'Brahmins made the cow a sacred animal.'[44]

Ambedkar's interpretation regarding the origins of Untouchability differed from that which he advanced about Shudras. The latter had been described as erstwhile Kshatriyas and were bound to recover their past status within the framework of the *varna* system. The logic of Sanskritization thus continued to prevail. In contrast, Untouchables were presented as descendants of Buddhists who regarded themselves as endowed with a separate identity, external to the caste system and hostile to its logic because of the egalitarian nature of Buddhism. The suggestion that Untouchables were once Buddhists offered the former tremendous scope for social mobilization. It bestowed on them an appropriate, egalitarian ethnic identity which could enable them to transcend their divisions into sub-castes, as much as in terms of geographical fragmentation given that Dalits are found throughout India and belong to different regional traditions and cultures.

Thus Ambedkar did not content himself with elaborating a theory of caste which culminated in the idea of graded inequality; he also devised an Untouchable 'tradition' that was to prove helpful in remedying social disparity. If they recognized themselves as former Buddhists, Untouchables would be better positioned to surmount their divisions and stand together as an ethnic group against the system as a whole. Gail Omvedt rightly points out that in this respect Ambedkar's views converged with those of Phule and Periyar. Their thought 'represents the effort to construct an alternative identity of the people, based on non-north Indian and low-caste perspectives, critical not only of the oppressiveness of the dominant Hindu caste society but also of its claims to antiquity and to being the major Indian tradition.'[45] The notion of autochthony played a key role in Ambedkar's theory. He argued that if Hindu India had been invaded by Muslims, Buddhist

India had been subjugated by Brahmin outsiders much before that. Omvedt considers that there was 'a racial ethnic element in all of this, in which Ambedkar identifies his heroes to some extent with non-Aryans . . .'[46]

Even before Ambedkar tried to endow the Untouchables with a noble and separate identity, as is evident in *The Untouchables*, politically speaking he began to contest Sanskritization by other means as early as in the 1920s.

12

Self-Purification vs. Self-Respect

On the Roots of the Dalit Movement*

D.R. NAGARAJ

> Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and a heretic.—***Wittgenstein, 'On Certainty'***

The best way to begin is by a critical invocation of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. After all, the Buddhist method, taught by the Tathagatha, excels in offering a critique of the master himself. The Dalit movement, which in ways more than one owes its existence to Babasaheb, is also facing a crisis because he fathered it. A critical estimate of his philosophical and political career will both illuminate and situate the movement in a proper context.

Irony of ironies: to understand the nature of Babasaheb's political career one has to place it along with Gandhiji's, for the apparent divergence between the two will highlight the unique problems of the former. Is the irreconcilability between the two real and fundamental? I shall try to explore a truthful answer to this question. Since the answer will have far-reaching consequences for the Dalit movement, one has to proceed with care and caution, fighting deep-rooted prejudices and, of

course, wishful thinking too. The Dalit movement, I suggest, is a product of the mental state that believed in the firm rejection of the Gandhian model of tackling the problems of Untouchables, and that has shaped the contours of its themes and patterns. But today historical circumstances have changed, and their consequences have forced us to re-examine the origin and structure of those forces that have conditioned the movement. Even if a nasty surprise is in store for us, we should be able to bear it, for it could also mean the existence of certain undiscovered affinities.

For a start, let us study the already accepted notions regarding the Gandhiji—Ambedkar relationship. While studying this we should be extremely careful for we have become captives of the picture that has been presented to us. Babasaheb's politics was decidedly different from the Gandhian ideology and cultural politics that had dominated the nation till 1947. Gandhiji had become the centre of the nation's politics, and those who disagreed with him—there were many—were considered eccentrics. Particularly, the imprint of the Gandhian model of tackling the Harijan question merits serious analysis. This question has been foisted on us by the necessity of studying the Congress—Harijan leadership against which the angry young generation of Dalits revolted in the 1960s and afterwards. The Harijan leadership created by Gandhiji was not at all like him; the politico-psychological factors that shaped these leaders had given birth to a new kind of nationalist political articulation, but there was a great deal of silence also on socio-cultural questions. A paradoxical convergence of articulation and silence. In the post-Independence decades, a new generation of Dalits interpreted the nationalist rhetoric of senior Harijan leaders as nationalist crap, which concealed structural disparities, and dubbed the cultural silence of these leaders both as domestication and cowardice. For a change, in the history of sociocultural movements it was not exactly a case of a passionate misreading of the Father tradition. The case for patricide looked both genuine and unavoidable. Was the judgement on senior Harijan leaders not too harsh, and equally guilty of ignorance of the complex historical forces which shaped them? Well, that is the seductive charm of history; she convinces one that a partial view is the total view

and drives the passionate to act. Here lies, precisely, the liberatory potential of history. One who waits for the total view will never act nor even take a plunge into history.

Both Babasaheb and Bapuji plunged into history with such creative impatience and clashed. Historical action is the *Mahasamadhisthiti* of the creatively impatient, and having jumped into action they cured each other's excesses; they emerged as transformed persons at the end of a very intense encounter. I am referring to the complex yet fascinating Gandhiji—Ambedkar encounter of the 1930s. It is true, though each continued to refer to the other as a 'fool' and 'heretic' (not necessarily using these very words), till the end of their respective lives. This ferocity was more true, however, in the case of Babasaheb. But I suspect that this was only for the sake of form; it was for the consumption of those who laid a great deal of emphasis on the continuity of form. By the end of the mid-1930s both Ambedkar and Gandhiji were not the same persons they were when they had set out on a journey of profound engagement with each other. They were deeply affected and transformed by each other. Let us study this story closely. I shall not try to explain the story, but here is an attempt to describe its major events. As for its source, I have chosen several issues of the weekly Gandhiji edited, *Harijan*. In my view, particularly the issues between 1933 and 1935 are truly a work of epic dimension, with all the stunning variety of genres, with the experiences of life having transcended their limitations and become genres of literature.[1]

Untouchability was one of Gandhiji's central concerns. In all historical fairness, it must be admitted that it was Bapu who made untouchability one of the crucial questions of Indian politics, although there were many yogis and movements before him in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries whose contributions require deeper understanding and analysis. On the whole, there seemed to be a general ferment in Indian society of the nineteenth century, which created both social movements and a religious symbolism that sought to question the foundations of the caste system. The mechanisms which generated these movements and activities were not necessarily linked to India's

problematic relationship with the West, although some were decidedly the products of this contact or encounter.[2]

In fact, historically speaking, a whole range of indigenous yogis and sadhus, for whom colonialism hardly mattered either as a transitory phase or as a force to be resisted, had tried to deny, quite forcefully, the centrality of caste hierarchy in the scheme of things. In this regard, Shishunala Sheriff and Kaivara Narayanappa, the two yogis of Karnataka, and the Satnamis and the Mahima movement of North India come to mind immediately. Apparently, the chief reason for their inability to influence historical events in any significant way was that they did not either see or present the problem (untouchability, in this instance) as a political one, which was necessary for the regeneration of Indian society as a whole. To be precise, they did not see their society as part of a nation-sate. For these indigenous radicals, the task of fighting the caste system had been one of the spiritual requirements of their tradition. Their notion of society was, basically, a cultural one consisting of smaller communities, which lived intimately in terms of geographical and social space. Most of them lived and travelled, say, in a geographical boundary of 100—200 miles. They were the conscience of smaller communities. Colonial intervention—the historical experience which has dominated Indian discourse totally for more than a century —did not make them nervous. Some of them were awed by this intrusion while some maintained a stoic indifference towards it.

The most important reason for such a response on the part of these yogis was that their tradition had always treated temporal power as something alien, on which very little or no positive influence could be exerted. According to them, state power and historical agencies are like nature: erratic and beastly at one time; and friendly, generous, and benevolent at another. Many have used nature metaphors in response to the colonial intervention. Shishunala Sheriff, a Muslim—a Virashaiva yogi with a Brahmin Advaitin guru—has described this in a beautiful poem as the birth of rain-flies which descend on the fields at the onset of monsoons. He had also reacted to the setting up of a ginning mill in Hubli as the beginning of capitalist industrialization. The response

made him write a poem which begins with the line: 'Look at the vast expanse of the mill and salute it', and proceeds by totally spiritualizing the experience. Even the machine, with all its complex mechanical body, could provide him with a perfect metaphor to delineate the more complex yogic experience. Thus, he equated the mill with a transcendental realm of existence.

To put it differently, anxiety and nervousness—the two experiences which are presented as central to colonialism by modern theorists—were never the dominant mental states of these yogis. For them, the liberation of the self from the phenomenal world was a spiritual goal, and both the arrogance and humiliation of the caste system were the major obstacles in the path of moksha or nirvana. Not surprisingly, these yogis did not make use of the logical schools of Indian philosophy. Their anti-caste attitude was, mostly, a product of a-Brahminical traditions, though many dissident Brahmins too contributed to their glory and vitality. In the view of these yogis, the spiritual transformation of the 'being' has the aspect of social reform built into it. It was not a deliberate position or a dogma, but simply a matter of metaphysical requirement.

That Gandhiji, not Ambedkar, had many things in common with these yogis is evident from the way he defined the problem of untouchability, though he was different from them in many ways. Since desi spiritual traditions were slight modifications of the Bhakti Schools of both Shaiva and Vaishnava varieties, Gandhiji could be innovative. He drew inspiration from the Vaishnavite tradition, for instance, on the centrality of temple symbolism, which gave him many moments of inner torment and self-questioning. We shall return to this theme later. As opposed to the yogis, anxiety had entered Gandhiji quite deeply; he knew the destructive power of colonialism too well to harbour any illusions about its neutrality or to pretend that it would pass away smoothly without injuring the Indian psyche. He had stubbornly refused to transcend the reality of colonial experience, which was the practice with some yogis. Many other traditions had also shaped Gandhiji's sensibility, and they were certainly not Western. When anxiety, a product of colonial experience, became unbearable for

Gandhiji, thus threatening the very integrity of existence, Indian spiritual traditions provided him with a healing touch. However, Gandhiji never allowed spiritualist zeal towards annihilation of the caste ego to turn his priorities upside down in the larger task of nationalist struggle. Similarly, the nationalist battle against foreign power did not reduce the importance of the struggle against the caste system. But before his encounter with Ambedkar in the 1930s, Gandhiji considered untouchability a basically religious and spiritual problem; in his diagnosis, Gandhiji followed the models found in Indian mystical schools.

There exists another response—wholly secular in character and thrust—to the problem of the caste system. This is popularly referred to as the non-Brahmin movement of the South, although it is by no means confined to the region.[3] This development is overdetermined by a whole range of complex forces, of which the politics of colonial intervention is the most crucial factor. It is a deliberate, organized, and conscious effort on the part of the lower castes and social groups.[4] They chose to fight the hegemony of superior castes through gradualist and constitutionalist methods that they had learnt from their white masters. The demands of the Shudras were materialist. The colonial policy of promoting collaborative elites also had played a big role in shaping the movement.[5] The social policy of the British Raj, in combination with an intense desire for upward mobility among the lower castes, had generated quite strong optimism among the Shudras; but unfortunately the non-Brahmin parties and movements were not adequate enough as a medium for the realization of these ambitions.

It is quite easy to denigrate the importance of this movement, as has been done by scholars of various persuasions in the past. The non-Brahmin movement, particularly in its incarnations as the Justice Party in the Madras Presidency and the Prajamitra Mandali in the princely state of Mysore, lacked big ideas and was given to opportunistic and anti-nationalist political manoeuvres. To take an uncharitable view of this movement, one could describe it as a rat-race to join the ranks of government clericaldom. The leadership of the movement was drawn

from the Shudra middle castes and landed gentry, who were infuriated by the fact that Brahmins had cornered and dominated both important as well as minor official positions in governments. The internal contradictions of the movement surfaced in public quite often. Particularly, the condescending attitude of the middle castes was hardly sufficient to conceal caste Hindu prejudices. These castes had internalized the brahminical value system entirely. In fact, this is one of the major problems faced by the Dalit movement today. Whenever it tries to build a larger base for itself by involving other castes as allies, very soon contradictions emerge, which assume particularly acute forms with regard to questions of values. Other non-Brahmin castes would not hesitate to take the support of Dalits when it is a question of fighting against the hegemony of other powerful social groups. In fact, they would be quite desperate to build such an alliance. But they usually shy away on fundamental social and cultural issues. In other words, the Janus-faced collaborative tendencies of other castes are an integral part of their mobility, and they are active allies of social and cultural conservatives. This tendency was evident in the early years of the non-Brahmin movement.

All these rightful criticisms should not make us blind to the complexity of those forces which had shaped the movement, and the partial legitimacy it had gained. The Dalit movement was confined to the justified task of securing proportional representation in jobs and education. Here one should pause for a while and reflect on the relation between the noble and ignoble faces of such movements. Usually, one is moved by lofty philosophical talk against caste, but equally horrified by the mean and ignoble faces of the movement. The latter are seen in the determined—though at times crude—efforts to secure jobs and other material benefits in the name of communal justice and positive discrimination. Both the beauty and the horror stem from the source of defying the caste system. The caste system in India is not only a structure of cultural values but also embodies a certain pattern of inequitable distribution of power and wealth of different kinds along the lines of caste hierarchy. Hence, one who appreciates the spiritual beauty of the revolt against the caste system should also accept the

horror of materialist demands. Gandhiji could respond deeply to the spiritual beauty of the revolt, but he recoiled in utter embarrassment when confronted with its material form. Even to this day, such a fragmented response to the injustices of the caste system continues to affect liberal supporters of the Dalit movement. They are, justly, touched by the exercises in symbolic politics, and strangely annoyed when they see the movement's involvement with concrete issues like the Mandal Commission.

The origin of the Dalit movement lies in the convergence of these two forces: the transcendental aspect of fighting caste ego, and the mundane reality of fighting for real opportunities in education and jobs. If the aspirations of the people are not translated into terms real and tangible, there is always the danger of a movement losing its wider social base. At the same time, it can also become a prisoner of the materialist and immediately realizable demands of an articulate and influential group within that social class. The terrifyingly commonsensical approach of a movement can diminish its radical energy and potential. Against this background, Babasaheb had developed a pragmatic attitude towards the non-Brahmin movement which was also equally informed by more radical aims. He was in deep sympathy with its drive towards upward mobility, and simultaneously suspicious of the status quoist implications of such moves. In a dinner speech in 1944, when the Justice Party was trounced in the general elections within the Madras Presidency, Ambedkar reflects deeply on the decline and downfall of the party:

> Then what was wrong with the party to make it fall like a pack of cards, notwithstanding the long period in office? What was it that made the party unpopular with a large majority of non-Brahmins themselves? In my view, two things were responsible.
>
> Firstly, they had not been able to realize exactly what their differences were with Brahminical sections. Though they indulged in virulent criticism of Brahmins, could any one of them say those differences had been doctrinal? How much Brahminism had they in them? They wore namams and regarded themselves as second class

Brahmins. Instead of abandoning Brahminism they had been holding on to the spirit of it as being the idea; their anger against Brahminism was that they (the Brahmins) gave them only a second class degree.

The second reason for the downfall of the party was its very narrow political programme. One defect in the political programme of the non-Brahmin party had been that the party made it its chief concern to secure a certain number of jobs for their young men. That was perfectly legitimate. But, did the non-Brahmin young men for whom the party fought for twenty years to secure jobs in public service remember the party after they received emoluments for their jobs? During the twenty years the party had been in office, it forgot the 90 per cent of the non-Brahmins living in the village, leading an uneconomical life and getting into the clutches of moneylenders.[6]

This speech throws up two interrelated themes that have a definite bearing on the different kinds of pulls within the Dalit movement today. First, the process of upward mobility of a certain section within the multitude of Dalits and its induction into the middle class ethos. This process generates a powerful optimism among the class, which usually envelops the entire community, and the basis of this optimism is both real and illusory: real in the sense that a visible section of the community gets into public services, thus presenting itself as a model to be emulated. But it is also, ultimately, illusory—in the sense that Dalits as a whole can never attain the status achieved by their own visible minority, not without structural change in the entire society of which they are part. The real problem of this selective upward mobility lies elsewhere. I would describe it as the phenomenon of wilful amnesia. To be more precise, it is amnesia towards one's own past. Babasaheb was referring to this same problem when he posed a question to the Justice Party: did non-Brahmin young men remember the party after they had received their new job emoluments? The working of the caste system has always tried to create mental states of self-doubt, self-denial, and self-hatred among lower-caste individuals in the modern context, and, generally these attitudes are collectivized. The birth of the modern individual in the humiliated communities is not only accompanied by a

painful severing of ties with the community, but also a conscious effort to alter one's past is an integral part of it.

Dr Siddalingaiah, well-known Kannada Dalit writer, portrays this entire syndrome in his unique style full of humorous pathos, wit, and irony in his play *Panchama* (The Fifth One). The dramatic locale of the play is an interview conducted by an IAS officer, Hayavadan Rao, whose brahminical arrogance and condescension dwarf and deform all the untouchable candidates who appear before him. The first four candidates, both men and women, present different faces of the making of modern Dalit identity in all its inauthentic forms. The first four are not sure of themselves, are awkward and clumsy, they lie and are caught in the act; one thing common to them all is that they show an attitude of wilful amnesia towards their past. Panchama appears, and then everything is changed utterly. A terrible beauty is born. Hayavadan Rao has not seen the like of The Fifth One before in his entire life. Panchama not only refuses to forget his past, he remembers it deliberately. An aura of noble anger surrounds him. The play ends with an impassioned plea to his community to begin a new life of self-respect. To put it metaphorically, while the first four ones of the play are the unavoidable baggage of the Dalit movement, Panchama is its power and glory.

Since the very moment of its inception, the Dalit movement is saddled with the first four ones in this play, which distinguishes the movement from the Marxist-Leninist-inspired struggles of the landless that are prevalent in rural India. But it would be culturally blind to judge the first four as beyond redemption. Such a position ignores the psychology of the caste system and the way it deforms human beings. The first four need succour, a radical atmosphere, which will accept and respect their Dalit identity, and only a strong movement could provide that. The entire Dalit movement starts at one level from the assumption that the first four will be eventually transformed as the Panchama. That is also the understanding of the play. The task of transforming its own inadequate members is central to the movement and also points to its inbuilt idealism.

To take the debate further, such wilful amnesia regarding one's own past on the part of an influential group meant a firm riveting of the Dalit movement to the present. In terms of actual demands, this entailed considerable pressure on the Dalit movement to act as an instrument to promote and safeguard the interest of select groups. Hence, Dalit struggle was subjected to a definite process of conditioning and reflected only the aspirations of city-based groups. It was to the credit of Babasaheb that he identified this danger at the very beginning of the Dalit movement.

A second theme that Babasaheb introduced was the problem of defining alternative cultural values not only for an individual Dalit but also for the entire movement. The state of amnesia induced a state of stupor, discouraging the painful effort of building a new culture along with the rejection of the old. Dr Ambedkar could never tolerate this cultural inertia, and his entire life can be summed up as a relentless battle against such a mental state, although this landed him in many problems while defining the relationship between a movement and the structure of its memories.[7] This was one of the areas where Dr Ambedkar clashed bitterly with Gandhiji. The latter's use of Hindu symbols was heavily dependent on mainstream Hinduism and the method he used to invest them with radical energy could hardly inspire the non-initiate. Gandhiji's method of using Hinduism required a very profound kind of inwardness in relation to a very imaginative way of expressing dissent against it. Not only Harijan followers of Bapu, but even his caste Hindu followers—with the possible exception of Lohia and Rajaji—could follow his double-edged use of Hindu symbolism. The majority of them understood and practised it as a celebratory act, thus missing the subversive dimensions. It was only during the Temple Entry movement that they were placed in a confrontationist situation. But the enemies of Bapu had well understood the implications of his strategies, allowing them to go unchallenged. His detractors succeeded where his disciples failed.

As far as Ambedkar was concerned, the dialectical method adopted by Gandhiji appeared complicated and too ineffective a route to fight

the evils of Hinduism. Developing such inwardness towards Hinduism could easily degenerate into pious and mild grumbling about the caste hierarchy, and this is what happened with the majority of the followers of Gandhiji. Babasaheb wanted a strong bedrock foundation to build a new Church (to alter Eliot slightly), whereas the Vatapi Garbha of Hinduism allows only the occasional eruption of protest—only to be reabsorbed again in the quiescence of conservatism. But for the time being the relevant thing for us is that the impassioned and sad reference to village India by Babasaheb almost sounds Gandhian, and the reverse reading is equally true. This shall be the theme of my narrative. After their encounter with each other during the 1930s, Gandhiji and Ambedkar had internalized each other. This could happen only in the midst of a series of malignant clashes. The whole story is worth recounting for the richness of its symbolism.

II

Gandhiji's take-off point was that the problem of untouchability was a problem of the self, which in this case was the collective Hindu self. He had transformed the notion of individual self and shifted the necessity of clearing the cobwebs of caste ego to the level of the larger notion of the collective self. But he always stubbornly maintained the importance of internalizing these values at the personal level too. The untouchable is a part of the self. He saw the movement to eradicate untouchability as a sacred ritual of self-purification: 'The movement for the removal of Untouchability is one of self-purification.'[8]

This religious emphasis on the self has to be situated against the background of what is neutrally referred to as the Poona Pact of September 1932. The pact has been seen as a decisive point in the battle between the irreconcilable positions represented by Bapu and Babasaheb. Babasaheb defined the problem in terms of building an independent political identity for Dalits in the structures of social, economic, and political power, whereas for Gandhiji it was purely a religious question, and that too an internal one for Hinduism. He did not at all take kindly to the challenge thrown by this new position

aggressively represented by Dr Ambedkar. At the level of visible historical evidence, it was Gandhiji who had won this battle, and even today this has remained a deep scar in the minds of Ambedkarites. As rightly guessed by Ravinder Kumar, what prompted Ambedkar to accept the pact was his fear of massive retribution upon Dalits in the eventuality of Gandhiji's death.[9] Everything, however, was in favour of the Father of the Nation. Fortunately, he was not the sort of man who would gloat over what were ephemeral victories seen in the perspective of history. For Gandhiji truth was more important, and in his heart of hearts he had realized that his victory stood on shaky grounds. The Krishna of history had lent a helping hand to humble Karna. Gandhiji had to know the truth. Raghavan Iyer, in his brilliant exposition of Gandhiji's ideas, locates the complex significance of the Mahabharata in his life. 'Gandhiji invoked the Mahabharata in support of his view that Dharma signifies the way of truth and non-violence and not the mere observance of ritual externals. The scriptures, he said, have given us two immortal maxims—1. Ahimsa is the supreme law of Dharma; and 2. There is no other law of Dharma than Sathya or truth.'[10]

The Yerawada fast was an outcome of Gandhiji's committed *dharmik* position both in its abstract and applied forms. Gandhiji, I think, this time deeply felt the tragic separation between dharma and satya, and further that Ambedkar's way of looking at untouchability could also be a truth, which thus had to be tested. So began one of the most fascinating encounters in Indian history. The pages of *Harijan* are a moving witness to this. In the first issue itself (11 February 1933), both Ambedkar and Gandhiji came out with their authentic views on the question. Gandhiji considered some issues deeply and wrote in his usual forthright manner, without any rhetoric. Ambedkar's question: 'Why do you restrict the movement to the removal of Untouchability only? Why not do away with the caste system altogether? If there is a difference between caste and caste and caste and Untouchability, is it not one only of degree?' And Gandhiji's answer:

> Untouchability as it is practised today in Hinduism in my opinion, is a sin against God and man and is, therefore like a poison slowly

> eating into the very vitals of Hinduism. There are innumerable castes in India. They are a social institution and at one time they served a very useful purpose, as, perhaps, they are even doing now to a certain extent . . . There is nothing sinful about them. They retard the material progress of those who are labouring under them. They are no bar to the spiritual progress. The difference, therefore, between caste system and Untouchability is not one of degree, but of kind.[11]

These views, along with Gandhiji's belief in *varnashrama dharma,* have been characterized as being at the core of his conservative social philosophy and attacked severely by radicals. In a way, this can also be read as a statement about the equality of castes, with which the majority of Hindu liberals would have no difficulty. The upper caste and middle-caste intelligentsia, in particular, would define the positive aspects of the caste system in terms of its capacity to provide its members with a feeling of identity. These qualities would certainly seem appealing in the context of the homogenizing tendencies of international capital. But from the viewpoint of Dalits the picture is radically different. Instead of offering a sense of identity and security, the caste system constantly threatens them with humiliation and insult. Similarly, the problem of identity carries a stigma which cannot easily be erased. Against this background, any attempt to defend or show the caste system in a positive light is suspect from the viewpoint of the Dalit movement. It was this position, precisely, that Babasaheb articulated in the first issue of *Harijan.* 'The outcaste is a by-product of the caste-system. There will be outcastes as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste-system. Nothing can help to save Hindus and ensure their survival in the coming struggle except the purging of this odious and vicious dogma . . .'[12]

This brief statement, interestingly enough, was made in the context of differing with Gandhiji, and this has served as a manifesto of the Dalit movement over the last two decades. The tenor of this statement has carved out a distinct identity for the Dalit movement, which is different from other forms of Shudra dissent. Gandhiji's endorsement of the caste system came in for harsh criticism in the 1930s itself. He would never

repudiate it totally, although he conceded the legitimacy of some attacks in the mid-1930s. Rammanohar Lohia, the most imaginative leader of Left-Gandhians, analysed the implications of the caste system—in certain categories—which had more affinity with Ambedkarite terms.[13] Gandhiji, in his dislike of the dehumanizing tendencies of modern civilization, became somewhat soft towards the equally dangerous structures of caste society.[14] Lohia had no such illusions about the caste system, and hence he could develop a more subtle theory of injustices in traditional India and their techniques of self-perpetuation.

One could also debate the issue of differences between Gandhiji and the radicals employing different categories. The former did not find any fault with the 'constitutive rules' of the caste system, and his conviction was that something went wrong with the regulative aspects of it.[15] Only a strong movement could correct this, thus restoring its original vitality. The radicals, however, did not agree with this; for them, the difference between constitutive and regulative rules was not tenable, both ethically and philosophically. The only alternative was to define and articulate different sets of rules which were a negation of the previous sets at all levels. Interestingly, although Ambedkar had rejected the Gandhian definition of the constitutive rules of the caste system, he nevertheless played the game along the rules laid down by Bapu.[16] This becomes clear when one considers the Temple Entry movements led by Babasaheb and his followers. Two Temple Entry satyagrahas, the first one at the Parvati temple in Poona (1929) and the second one at the Kalaram temple in Nasik (1930—5) deserve special attention. Although Ambedkar was not physically present in the Parvati temple, he was the source of inspiration. Eleanor Zelliot sums up the importance of these satyagrahas thus:

> The effort was conducted in the Gandhian style, but it was not approved by Gandhiji or by the Congress. Gandhiji's name was not mentioned but the technique and inspiration for the *Satyagraha* undoubtedly were drawn from Gandhiji's teachings. Organised by Ambedkar and local Mahar leaders, the Kalaram satyagraha involved thousands of Untouchables in intermittent efforts to enter

> the temple and to participate in the annual temple procession. As in the case of the Parvati satyagraha of Poona the attempt was unsuccessful. The outcome of the Kalaram Satyagraha, however was not only further disillusionment with the *Satyagraha* method and the attitude of the Congress, but also a rejection of Hinduism and a strengthening of the separatist political stance then developing among the Untouchables.[17]

Ambedkar succeeded in drawing attention towards inbuilt contradictions in the symbolic politics of the Temple Entry movement, and studying these contradictions would be quite relevant to the present-day Dalit movement as well, since the temple has remained at the centre of popular Hinduism.

Let us pause here a while and reflect on the symbolism of the temple and Gandhiji's relationship with it. In Hindu culture, the temple has always been both a source of spiritual joy and a symbol of material power. Basavanna, the great saint-leader of the twelfth-century Virashaiva movement of Karnataka, rejected the very notion of the temple, which had become an instrument of power. He saw the human body itself as a temple. But Vaishnavites treat the issue differently, and in their symbolism the temple has a dominant place. Gandhiji had a very ambiguous attitude towards the temple, signifying a deeper conflict within him between his Vaishnavite attachment to the temple and a sort of Advaitin denial of the same.[18] In an issue of *Harijan,* Gandhiji says: 'for I have always believed God to be without form.'[19] Coupled with this is the fact that he rarely visited temples during the period of the Temple Entry movement. In Gandhiji, there existed two personalities: the radical spiritualist of tradition who, like Basavanna, upholds the human body as a temple; and a second, that of a modern interventionist seeking to influence the course of historical events. He tried to achieve a synthesis of the two, but not always successfully. Subtle failures in this regard often assumed fierce forms to ridicule him. Basavanna would not have presented one thing for the self, a different thing for the other. The anti-temple stand of radical spiritualists was irreconcilable with the Vaishnavite veneration of the temple. Probably,

Gandhiji had realized this contradiction, and tried to achieve a synthesis of both positions by using the same method of positing a difference between constitutive and regulative rules. It was an effort to save the spiritual significance of the temple, while simultaneously explaining its proneness to decay. Here is the difficult exercise undertaken by Gandhiji. 'Temples of stone and mortar are nothing else than a natural extension of these human temples and though they were in their conception undoubtedly habitations of God—like human temple they have been subject to the same law of decay as the latter.'[20]

Even this attempt could not satisfy the critics. Surprisingly, it was Rabindranath Tagore who disagreed with Gandhiji's inauthentic fascination for the temple and wrote a reply which was published in the *Harijan* of 1 April 1933. 'Dear Mahatmaji, it is needless to say that I do not at all relish the idea of divinity being enclosed in a brick and mortar temple for the special purpose of exploitation by a particular group of people. I strongly believe that it is possible for the simple-hearted people to realize the presence of God in the open air, in a surrounding free from all artificial obstruction.'[21]

Gandhiji, of course, did not offer to further elaborate his position on temples.

In Gandhiji's handling of the Hindu symbolism and temple entry, we could also identify the merger of two stands: the exegetical exercise of a Pouranika and the shrewd political interventionist who has an eye on the immediate response of the people. The Pouranika is always moved by an intense desire to reinterpret texts and symbols, and the mythological rigour of this exercise lies in his capacity to separate the constitutive and regulative rules in an effective manner. His constant refrain is that origin has a different meaning: the impassioned imagination of the Pouranika can make texts and symbols signify the desired meaning. And this was undoubtedly the Gandhian mode of engagement with Hindu symbolism. The political interventionist and realist in Gandhiji had understood the deeper craving for temples among Harijans in the absence of other strong alternatives. As said earlier, temples have always been a source of spiritual joy and a symbol

of material pride. Dalits usually assert their new identity by demanding temple entry and equal religious rights. It is intensely real to them on both these counts.

Yet, when a given religious tradition is insulting to their self-respect, Dalits assert dignity by rejecting to perform their traditional roles in temples. In such cases, the position of the Dalit movement has been fairly simple and has supported such moves; whereas in the context of temple entry the movement faces many contradictions. By supporting temple entry, it suffers from the guilt of supporting the very symbolic structure that it vows to fight. On the other hand, a stubborn rejection of temple entry amounts to neglecting an important dimension of temples as a structure of material power and pride. The movement also risks alienating Dalits.

There is another significant dimension to this problem. The right to worship the same god, although through different forms and means, was one of the major motifs of the medieval Bhakti movement. The story of Bedara Kannappa, the hunter, which is available in the medieval Bhakti literatures of both Tamil and Kannada, is a classic example of this. Kannappa worships Shiva in a 'non-vegetarian' way, much to the horror of vegetarian upper-caste priests.

Only 'believing' Gandhians could conceive of launching and sustaining the Temple Entry movement. With others, it would be an act of bad faith. Playing along with the Gandhian rule, Babasaheb soon realized both the bad faith dimension and the paradoxes involved in this movement, for he had already been tormented by cruel doubts about the very desirability of seeking solutions to the problems of Untouchables within the framework of Hinduism. And then Ambedkar also did not have any element of the Pouranika in him. In this sense, he had all the characteristics of first-generation Buddhists even before he formally became one. No tortuous hermeneutics. A simple, straightforward reading of meaning had always been Ambedkar's strength. In the hands of lesser people, exegetical and interpretive exercises could easily degenerate into bad faith. But Ambedkar was quick to act and bid goodbye to Hinduism in 1935.

What made Ambedkar's position significant was not that the majority of Untouchables supported him. On the contrary, there is enough evidence to show that they were on the other side. Influential leaders like M.C. Rajah were more favourably disposed towards Gandhiji. But Ambedkar had no use for Pouranika talent. He believed that Hinduism is the very embodiment of *avidya,* or ignorance, and can never be rejuvenated.

While playing along with the Gandhian rule of temple entry, Babasaheb was almost simultaneously trying to articulate and build an alternative mode. In this regard, the Mahad Tank Struggle of 1927 to assert the Untouchable's right to use public water demands serious discussion. There is a world of difference between temple and tank, and Ambedkar's way of leading that struggle serves as a useful guide to understand the differences that existed between him and Gandhiji. In Ambedkar's Mahad model, the emphasis was on treating the question of untouchability as a civil rights issue. In that case anyone—Christian, Muslim, and secularist—could support the struggle without feeling they were trespassing into the private affairs of a religion. In Kerala, the Vaikkam Temple Entry satyagraha was about to acquire such a character, but Gandhiji resisted efforts to secularize the issue. For him it was purely an internal religious affair of Hinduism. Even modern democratic methods have no role in this regard. If one treats the problem of untouchability as a civil rights issue, then naturally other socio economic and political forces join together to build a formidable front against the religious rights approach. In fact, in the pages of *Harijan* itself such challenges went on increasing, laying a great deal of emphasis on the total or economic uplift of the community. Gandhiji himself records the resolution passed at Agra's Harijan Conference. This is an excerpt from the resolution:

> Harij an Movement lays stress on the Temple Entry problem more than on economical and educational problems. The former item of the programme is not desirable for the Harijans, since it will produce slave mentality, spirit of blind devotion and many other evils which will go to mar the efficiency of the Harijans. The Pujari-Samaj will dominate the Harijans and they will become slaves of Pujaris. Hence

> it is highly necessary that great emphasis must be laid on the educational and economic aspects of the progress. Inter-caste marriage and inter-dining must be on the programme of the movement.[22]

While agreeing with the first line of the above-cited resolution, Gandhiji argued that the uplift of Harijans would not be complete without throwing open the temples, which would be an admission of the religious equality of Harijans. Gandhiji was not an unequivocal supporter of the demand for inter-caste marriage and inter-dining. He did not want to provoke the wrath of Sanatanis on these issues. Even while agreeing with his own son's inter-caste marriage, he tried to downplay the obvious radical implications of the event. Such vacillations on the part of Gandhiji made him suspect in the eyes of radicals.

Apart from all these things, Babasaheb had more fundamental difficulties with the Gandhian model, and these can be summed up as follows. Since Gandhiji saw the movement to eradicate untouchability as a sacred ritual of self-purification, it had placed a great deal of moral responsibility on the caste Hindu self. A profound ethical halo would envelop the caste Hindu, which would look almost spiritual. This would in turn generate awe in the minds of Harijans, who were attracted towards Gandhiji and the Congress. This was precisely what happened during pre-Independence days.

The agony of the spiritual cleansing of the Hindu self, leading to self-purification, had acquired tones of public grandeur, and in a subtle way led to the glorification of the individual self. Gandhian tales of sacrifice, courage, and struggle against Hindu orthodoxy almost became household talk in those areas where the nationalist struggle was popular. In other places it acquired a legendary character, inviting both ridicule and veneration. Gandhian grit and determination generated gratitude in the hearts of Harijans. Even the Sanatanis were not left untouched. Being deeply moved by the epic fast of Gandhiji for the great Harijan cause, a Sanatani Brahmin in UP even cleaned the latrines

of a government primary school before a big crowd of people in Dilkhuva on 18 May 1933.

The guilt-ridden Hindu self badly needed the untouchables to expiate its guilt, but the heroic stature of the caste Hindu reformer further dwarfed the Harijan personality. The literatures of our languages are full of such complex and yet moving encounters, and it can safely be said that this is one of the central themes of Indian literature produced during the phase of nationalism.[23]

The grandeur, the agony, the moving romanticism of the Gandhian project of self-purification also came to be seen as its Achilles heel, but it had succeeded in creating a leadership among grateful Harijans. Interestingly, not all untouchables were moved by the Gandhian act. There were enough critics and doubters who were more than keen to present a realistic assessment of the programme. Not surprisingly, *Harijan* itself carries such a critical piece, which acts as a counterpoint to Gandhian idealism. An untouchable correspondent portrays the relationship between the caste Hindu reformer and Harijans on these lines: 'All have to come to us as patrons. Hardly has anyone come as friend and equal, let alone as servant. Your provincial organization is no exception. It is difficult for a Harijan to approach its chief man without fear and trembling.'[24] Gandhiji had agreed with the bitter tenor of the correspondent's argument and conceded that there is a tendency towards self-glorification, but in the end he upheld the correctness of the path he had advocated.

In the intensely moving romantic tragedy of self-purification, *a la* Martin Greene, there was scope for only one hero, that is, Gandhiji himself. Extend the metaphor further: then it is the ultimate celebration of a hero's capacity to suffer spiritual isolation. But unfortunately the script could only be staged by caste Hindu incarnations of Gandhiji. He himself wrote to admit that 'What mattered was not so much the entry of Harijans to temples as the conversion of the orthodox to the belief that it is wrong to prevent Harijans from entering temples.'[25] This is that famous or notorious 'conversion of heart' theory. Radical critics accused him that the heart of the caste Hindu was scattered all over—in

land, wealth, property, socio-political power. Unless these were transformed, it was difficult to effect a conversion of the heart among caste Hindus. In the early months of 1933, Gandhiji could never agree with such a position, but he reflected on it quite deeply.

Even philosophically, the Gandhian model provided the caste Hindu self with much textured interiority, and what generated real tensions was the way it initiated the self-conscious Hindu reformer into the sacred ritual of confrontation against the orthodoxy. There was very little scope for a Congress Harijan leader to develop interesting and useful models of praxis from within. That was the basic limitation of the Gandhian mode: Sugreeva, Hanumantha, and Guha could never aspire to act the major part displacing the hero in the Ramayana. Only Rama is the hero and Ambedkar could never settle for the roles of Hanumantha and Sugreeva.

It is quite difficult to say whether Gandhiji had visualized the nature of the fallout of the practice of self-purification. The Congress Harijan leadership turned out to be quite soft and pliable—the two qualities that are quite pleasing to the hegemonic forces of traditional village society. The paradox was that Gandhiji challenged and sought to shake the very foundations of Hindu society, but Congress Harijans did not pose any real threat to the social and cultural establishment. The awed leadership remained pious Hindus, by and large. Because of this, unfortunately, many admirable qualities—their moral integrity, incorruptibility, rootedness in the community, and strong common sense—of Gandhian Harijans came to be disregarded. It was even satirized by the new generation of Dalits.

The tragedy of the Gandhian project of penance was that it came to mean different things to different people. For the idealist caste- Hindu it was a cross he had to inevitably bear; for the angry Dalit it was a subtle way of domesticating the radical energy of humiliated communities; and for the conservative Hindu forces it eventually meant, although after a great deal of resistance, a difficult exercise in repressive tolerance.

Babasaheb had no option but to reject the Gandhian model. He had realized that this model had successfully transformed Harijans as

objects in a ritual of self-purification, with the ritual being performed by those who had larger heroic notions of their individual selves. In the theatre of history, in a play with such a script, the untouchables would never become heroes in their own right; they are just mirrors for a hero to look at his own existentialist angst and despair, or maybe even glory.

Gandhiji had staked his entire life on the question of untouchability, and that too for tackling it in a particular way. It is for him fundamentally the matter of a religious right. Ambedkar opposed this, as discussed earlier, right from the beginning. In fact, Gandhiji's previous fast was undertaken to resist other modes of tackling the same question. The importance of his second epic fast in May 1933 has to be understood against this background. In the context of the first fast, the aims and objectives were clear: they were directed against the attempts to translate the problem of untouchables into the parlance of modern-day democratic processes in a colonial context. Such translation, Gandhiji seriously believed, could eventually prevent the 'natural growth' of the suppressed classes and would remove the incentive to make honourable amends from the suppressors. Such a position is itself a product of a firm belief in an organic community, which is essentially different from a modern democratic society. The very notion of an organic community—a favourite theme in post Enlightenment European thought—had special appeal for Gandhiji, and he thought that the contradictions of this society are not irreconcilable. In the framework of an organic community there is scope for natural resistance, which leads to equally natural ways of solving a problem. Such an arrangement would not wreck the fabric of a given society. Ambedkar totally disagreed with this position and its perspective on the matter in question in 1932: civil rights and equal opportunity in economic matters and social intercourse. Gandhiji's first fast was precisely against this.

In his first statement regarding his second fast (May 1933) Gandhiji had specifically declared that it was particularly against himself. He explains the background of the tempest that was raging within him, which was insistent on an unconditional and irrevocable fast for twenty-one days:

> During all these months since September last, I have been studying the correspondence and literature and holding prolonged discussions with men and women, learned and ignorant, Harijans and non-Harijans. The evil is far greater and even political power for Harijans, although all these three are necessary. But to be effective, they must follow or at least accompany inward health, inward organization and inward power. In other words, self purification; this can only come by fasting and prayer. We may not approach the God of Truth in the arrogance of strength, but in the meekness of the weak and the helpless.
>
> But the mere fast of the body is nothing without the will behind it. It must be a genuine confession of the inner fast, and irrepressible longing to express truth and nothing but truth. Therefore those only are privileged to fast for the cause of truth who have worked for it and who have love in them even for opponents, who are free from animal passion and who have abjured earthly possessions and ambition.[26]

This statement is rich because of its undercurrents and the complexity of the suggested meanings. When Gandhiji claims that untouchability will not be eradicated by money, external organizations, and even political power, he is critiquing Dr Ambedkar by using the language of spiritualists, for they see such efforts to achieve material progress as trivial. Within such a framework, ideas concerning economic opportunities are translated as money, and civil rights as well as social intercourse as political power. Incidentally, Ambedkar defines these three as major priorities for the untouchables. Translating the other viewpoint, even while debating it, is usually a tricky job, and this is where traditional Indian opponents are mutilated beyond recognition. But Gandhiji excels in his job as demolition expert without resorting to subtle exercises in logic; he does it just by reducing the other viewpoint to its essentials. But in this context he doesn't use the *reductio ad absurdum* method, for Gandhiji was never known to use *vitandavada* to further his arguments.[27]

Nevertheless, Gandhiji achieves the Nagarjunian goal, but by a different route: the other viewpoint is trivialized by reducing it to its

essentials. The trivialization seems deadly because it denies the legitimacy of the spiritual reasons that Ambedkar gave to strengthen his dissent. The point is that Gandhiji chose to ignore that spiritual dimension of Ambedkar's personality. According to Gandhiji, the materialist approach was the weakness of his adversary (Ambedkar), and, for the latter, spirituality was the weakness of Gandhiji: apparently these exclusivist positions concealed the simultaneous existence of both materialist and spiritual viewpoints in both of them. It was quite a decisive question in defining the parameters of the conflict. The line cited below suggests both the firm conviction and willingness to learn from the encounter. In it, Gandhiji, a victor in the recently concluded battle, solemnly admits: 'one may not approach the God of truth in the arrogance of strength'; hence the long consultations with others; but the opponent is very much there—although he too is to be loved.

I think this is the crucial difference between the two epoch-making fasts: in the first one, Gandhiji wanted to win, but in the second he was seeking truth. Arrogance of strength had disappeared in him, or the purpose of the fast was to fight it. The transformation of the external conflict into an internal one was complete. This was the moment of illumination where the distinction between inner and external worlds disappears.

One can compare this experience of Gandhiji with the brilliant poetic passage of the Marathi classic *Jnaneshwari,* which describes the state of Arjuna when confronted with the *vishwarupadarshana* (universal form) of Krishna. I am using this exaggerated analogy—*utprekshalankara*—only to highlight the complexity of the experience.

From a different perspective, Renford Bambrough, in one of his Wittgensteinian essays, considers the meaning of such situations and reflects on some of the central themes they throw up: 'That the philosopher who is alone in his room, meditating, confessing, engaging in criticism and self-criticism can be at the same time in contact and in conflict with others in the Academy, in the Agora, in the temple.'[28]

Such conflict—is it internal or external?—is resolved by the conversion from one side to another of the person who is the scene and

subject of the conflict. Here my purpose is to show that this was precisely what had happened with Gandhiji. At this stage, let me confess to the secret of my methodology, for I have adopted the working patterns of metaphor and imagination, which bring together undisclosed affinities.[29] One is forced to give up the method of the natural and social sciences where the examination of verifiable evidence leads to scientific conclusions. But metaphors and metaphorical reading work differently: they don't organize material in a system- making method. They take a leap and illuminate a truth defying all worldly logic, and this meaning could not have been reached through the route of the normal social sciences. The great Kannada poet Bendre describes the birth of metaphor in these lines:

> Flights of fancy rode on the back of the bee
> Rhythms were borne to wings of the sharpening wind.
> A lightning smile flashed and vanished.

The method of the social science is like working the earth: pains-taking preparation of the earth for the farmer. Well, the bee is a different species altogether.

III

If we treat the May 1933 fast like the central metaphor in a narrative poem, then a whole range of images starts revolving around it. Particularly, the image of a Harijan boy who went to meet Gandhiji in the evening at 6 o'clock on 8 May (after waiting for some hours) is haunting. This puts the birth of the Dalit movement in a totally different light. Mahadev Desai narrates this entire story with touching sincerity.[30] The boy had come to see Gandhiji to seek his help over a scholarship; he was simply anxious to secure an assurance. The boy had to pass through much misery and it was with difficulty that he had scraped together money to purchase a pair of sandals to come to the jail. Till this point, I was paraphrasing Mahadev Desai but I will let Desai himself describe the rest:

'Well are you satisfied? I give you the assurance', he (Gandhiji) said to the boy. 'No', said he, covering Gandhiji's feet with the flowers he had brought. 'Why should I ask others? Why, I have no faith in them. I have only in you. Everyone else is insincere.'

'But if all my associates are insincere', said Gandhiji, 'then I must be the insincerest of them all. You had better not trust me either.'

The boy had with courage kept on the feigned irony upto now, but he now burst into tears.

'Why then are you leaving us? You yourself say that your associates are impure. There is no purity around you and you must fast yourself to death.'

He uttered these words sobbing.

'But why do you say I am leaving you? I am not.'

'How can we believe it?' He said this with a fresh outburst of tears.

'I assure you, I am not going to die. Come along, we enter into a contract. On the noon of Monday 29th of May you come with an orange and I shall break my fast with its juice and then we shall talk about your scholarship. Are you satisfied?'

He beamed with joy, the tears had fled. 'Yes', he said. 'So you will keep the contract', said Gandhiji, everyone including him filling the prison cell with laughter.

So ends the first part of the story. It was more than poetic justice that a Harijan boy should offer orange juice to break the epic fast, which was undertaken for the cause of the untouchables. So the day arrived for which hundreds and thousands had prayed. Mahadev Desai had been expecting the Harijan boy who had entered into a contract with Gandhiji to offer orange juice. No, the boy did not turn up. Desai did not know his address either. The orange juice was supplied not by him but by the kind hostess, Lady Thackersey, who perhaps felt she was the luckiest woman that day. Among those present on that solemn occasion were Professor Wadia, Dr Ansari, Kaka Saheb, and Thakkar. The story is slowly abandoning its realist character and acquiring a symbolic tone. It

is becoming an image: to be fair to historical accuracy, the doorkeeper had flung the doors open to all Harijans, and the first and only garland offered to Gandhiji before the break of the fast was by a Harijan girl.

Well, why did the boy betray the contract? What happened? Let Desai, the truthful narrator, resume the story.

> I have already told the readers that the Harijan youth who had been booked to see Gandhiji with an orange at midday, 29th May, had failed to keep the appointment. I was not quite happy about it for the simple reason that I felt in his place he should not have failed to do so. It was not without a pang that I told everyone that the newspaper story of the youth having come was false. But on the 1st of June I got a letter (postage due) in which the youth complained that he did come but that he had failed to gain admittance. I immediately asked him to come with an orange although it was too late. He came and told me that he could not come at noon on the 29th because he was employed somewhere during the college vacation, but that he came late in the evening when he was not admitted. Next day he told me the true story, which should make us all think and feel the moral ruin that the cancer of Untouchability has wrought. He said he had come during the fast once or twice and had followed the progress of the fast with anxious interest, but on the last day his courage had failed him. He felt that he was too humble an individual to be admitted to the function that day; he also feared that his good fortune (if he came and was advertised by the newspaper) would excite the envy of some of his fellows and he might lose the little he had. It was a strange mixture of feelings, which had overcome him. But all of them are to be traced to the brand of Untouchability that he bore. He had not hesitated to come twice to the jail and send in his name to be admitted as an Untouchable visitor, but on an occasion of this kind he felt that he lacked the strength to take hold of the luck that had appeared before him. It is we who are responsible for fostering this feeling of undue self-abasement.[31]

The way Mahadev Desai reads the story reveals the inability of a certain kind of sentimental Gandhian to understand the complexity of

the educated Dalit psyche. What Desai sees as lack of strength could as well be profound unease regarding the nature of the whole Gandhian enterprise. Desai talks about abstract historical forces that have shaped the Harijan boy, but the boy is responding to the concrete situation glaring at him in the present. Desai gets sentimental and loses his capacity to notice the existence of many subtle and crude ironies in the situation, he doesn't even see the tragic gap that exists between the master and his disciples. Right from the beginning, the boy has retained his sense of irony and discrimination, and he also knew that what was tragic with the master had easily degenerated into farce with his *shishyas* or disciples. By lying, the boy was trying to protect himself from the danger of becoming an object of holy pity. The guilt of the past can humiliate its own source in the present. Metaphorically speaking, the Harijan boy who took a decision not to keep the appointment with Gandhiji was reborn as a Dalit youth. In a different sense, on that fateful afternoon, like Desai, he too came to the conclusion that there was no difference between Gandhiji and his followers. Ambedkar says that Gandhiji's enthusiasm for the Temple Entry movement petered out in the 1930s itself. The book *What the Congress and Gandhiji Have Done to the Untouchables* has a couple of angry and ironical passages regarding this. At the level of concrete historical evidence, what Ambedkar says is true and one can notice a definite shift in the orientation of the programme by Gandh- ians. In an issue of *Harijan,* C. Rajagopalachari had even declared: 'Untouchability is not yet gone. But the revolution is really over, and what remains is but the removal of the debris. The monster has been killed.'[32] The naivete of his position is amazing; and this coming from a shrewd, intellectual politician like Rajagopalachari makes it more mysterious.

There is sufficient evidence to prove that Ambedkar and Gandhiji had transformed each other. The latter extended the very scope and definition of the Harijan cause. It was no more a question of mere untouchability. It had become a larger holistic understanding of the untouchables. Because of the confrontation, both of them had changed their emphasis: to put it crudely, Gandhiji had taken over economics from Babasaheb and Ambedkar had internalized the importance of

religion. Gandhiji adopted the primacy of economic uplift, which was intelligently argued by non-Gandhian Dalits, and treated it as a question of rejuvenation of village India. In other words, Gandhiji sought to achieve a holistic philosophy of life with the Harijan question as the fulcrum, but the shift was construed as the conclusion of a successful revolution. Gandhiji himself explains the expansion of the scope of the Harijan cause:

> Some readers have taken exception to the way in which the columns of 'Harijan' are being occupied with the development of the village industries scheme, and some others have welcomed the change in what they had thought was a monotony of presentation. Either opinion is probably hasty. Any problem connected with the welfare of village as a whole must be intimately related to the Harijans, who represent over a sixth part of India's population. If a village gets good rice and flour, Harijans will benefit by the change as much as the rest of the population. But there is a special sense in which Harijans will benefit. Tanning and the whole of the raw hide work is their monopoly and economically this will occupy the best part of the new scheme.[33]

Such issues have formed the basis of the Ambedkar—Gandhiji encounter. But from the viewpoint of the present, there is a compelling necessity to achieve a synthesis of the two. They clash, quite bitterly at that, on major details but are complementary at a fundamental level. It is not an easy task to iron out the differences between the two masters, but the necessities of the present are forcing us to see their inner commonality. This is a hermeneutical task of refuting the extremist positions, which pose themselves as mutually exclusive and even threaten to cancel out each other. To describe the situation using the Buddhist dialectic method of Nagarjuna, both Gandhian and Ambedkarite positions had hardened themselves and they could not see the true nature of reality.

In the final analysis, what do we learn from Gandhiji which is of central relevance to the Dalit movement today? The liberation of the untouchable is organically linked to the emancipation of village India,

and the reverse is equally true. In this context, the Gandhian merger of the Harijan cause with the regeneration of the entire village has a great deal of relevance, but this enthusiasm has to be slightly altered from the Dalit perspective since village India is also seen virtually as the holes of hell by untouchables. But there is no other alternative. One should transform it totally as a livable and humane place. In other words, the Gandhian endorsement of village India has to be whetted by Ambedkarite scepticism; this is particularly essential regarding certain strategies for the economic empowerment of Harijans that Gandhiji suggests. Gandhiji took up the khadi programme in an ambitious way because simple weaving was almost an exclusive specialty of Harijans.[34] One need not take such ideas literally. The best way is to take them as a model of economic rejuvenation of the entire village economy with special emphasis on lower castes and untouchables. There are areas suggested by Gandhiji in his village reconstruction programme where his idealization of rural society ignores the working of the caste ethos: one such programme is village tanning, and Gandhiji places a great deal of emphasis on 'this most useful and indispensable industry'.[35] Such ideas just cannot be accepted. In the caste Hindu mind, tanning is unerasably linked with the untouchables, and that is one of the major sources of cultural stigma. The Ambedkarite insistence on the historic necessity for Dalits to give up such jobs is more realistic and radical in its implications.

Harijans need not be delinked from villages. In fact, one of the surest ways of empowering is to privilege them with independent means of subsistence. But achieving this end by means of tainted professions will be counterproductive from the viewpoint of Dalits. As suggested earlier, one should take the village-centred vision of Gandhiji and treat it with the Ambedkarite distrust of rural society to cure its romantic excesses. The lower castes in India have nowhere else to go, and their will to transform the existing rural society should be strengthened. Gandhiji wove a whole complex network of political, economic, social, and spiritual ideas around the central question of Harijans; the Dalit movement today is compelled to undertake an identical task. The forces of international capital will seek to destroy rural India. Along with this,

the lower castes are going to be maimed economically, culturally, and socially.

To conclude, how was Ambedkar transformed by Gandhiji? Babasaheb had always opposed treating the question of untouchability as a religious matter, but after his engagement with Gandhiji he accepted the primacy of religion in this context. But he did to religion what Gandhiji did to the idea of economic uplift. It is a pattern of acceptance, and altering the same. Religion is the crucial thing, true; to give up Hinduism itself was the Ambedkarite alteration. The 1935 Yeola Declaration of Ambedkar—that he would not die a Hindu—was an act of recognizing the legitimacy of the Gandhian mode while rejecting the choice for which the solution was sought. Economic uplift is an effective remedy, true; let us rejuvenate the entire village and not just sections of village society: such was the Gandhian transformation of the Ambedkarite idea. Even regarding the caste system, Gandhiji had to change his soft approval of it: in the *Harijan* of 16 November 1935 he simply declared that caste has to go, much to the consternation of his orthodox supporters. He even criticized the cruel restrictions on inter-dining and inter-caste marriage, a refreshing change compared to his earlier vacillation over these issues.

Needless to mention at this stage, both Gandhiji and Ambedkar can and should be made complementary to each other. Surely such efforts will be met with stiff opposition from hardened ideologues and researchers, and they are bound to unearth fresh evidence to fuel the fire between the two. One way of fighting such tendencies, apart from pointing out the political necessity of such hermeneutic exercise, is to file a philosophical caveat highlighting the notion of ontological difference to distinguish between contingent details of historical fact and the truth of a deeper historical concern.[36] At the level of deeper historical truth the conflicting fact disappears to reveal the underlying unity. The theoretical project of this entire book draws its sustenance from the notion of ontological difference. In this case, accepting and examining the difference leads to the truth of dynamic unity.

13

One Step Outside Modernity

Caste, Identity Politics, and the Public Sphere*

M.S.S. Pandian

I: Introduction

'. . . although I try to forget my caste, it is impossible to forget.' —
Kumud Pawde, 'The Story of My Sanskrit'

The autobiography of R.K. Narayan, the well-known Indian writer in English, is a useful place to begin explorations into the complex interrelationship between caste, identity politics, and the public sphere. When I read it recently, one of the things that struck me most was how Narayan, whose fictional world dealt substantially with the life of rural and small-town South India, was almost completely silent about his caste identity. In an autobiographical text running into 186 pages, he mentions his caste in only two places. The first instance is when he recollects his schooling in colonial Madras during the 1910s. He was the only Brahmin boy in his class in a school run by missionaries, the context being scripture classes within which Hinduism and Brahmins were chosen for some systematic lampooning. The second instance comes from his adult life—as a journalist working from Mysore. He wonders how he, a Brahmin, happened to be

employed as a stringer for the official newspaper of the South Indian Liberal Federation (or the Justice Party), *The Justice,* which vigorously enunciated anti-Brahminism in colonial South India. Interestingly, both are occasions when others bring his caste into being—rabidly fundamentalist Christians in one instance, and exclusivist non-Brahmins in the other. But for their incitement, caste may not have made even these two appearances in the rich and textured story of Narayan's life.[1]

For a man born in 1906 and one who witnessed the most acute battles around caste—Gandhi's threat to commit suicide which robbed, by means of the Poona Pact, the 'untouchable' communities of a separate electorate; the nationwide movement for temple entry by the untouchables; the rise of non-Brahmin politics in the Madras Presidency during the early decades of the twentieth century—Narayan's forgetfulness in relation to caste comes across as somewhat surprising. The surprise fades with a closer reading of his autobiography, through all of which caste masquerades as something else and makes a muted modern appearance. For instance, writing about his difficulties in getting a proper house to rent in Mysore, Narayan writes: 'our requirements were rather complicated—separate room for three brothers, their families, and a mother; also for Sheba, our huge Great Dane, who had to have a place outside the house to have her meat cooked, without the fumes from the meat pot polluting our strictly vegetarian atmosphere; a place for our old servant too, who was the only one who could go out and get the mutton and cook it.'[2] It does not need much of an effort to understand what 'strictly vegetarian atmosphere or meat, which is specified as mutton (i.e. it is not beef), encodes. This is caste by other means.[3]

The subtle act of transcoding caste and caste relations into something else—as though to talk about caste as caste would incarcerate one in a pre-modern realm—is characteristic of most upper-caste autobiographies. Caste always belongs to someone else; it is somewhere else; it is of another time. The act of transcoding is both an act of acknowledging and disavowing caste at once.

In marked contrast to upper-caste autobiographies, the self-definition of identity in the autobiographies of lower castes is located explicitly in caste as a relational identity. The autobiographical renditions of Bhama or Viramma, two Dalit women from the Tamilspeaking region, the poignant autobiographical fragments of Dalits from Maharashtra put together by Arjun Dangle in his edited volume *Corpse in the Well,* and Vasant Moon's *Growing up Untouchable in India* are all suffused with the language of caste. They are at times mutinous, at times moving.[4] Most often, the very act of writing an autobiography means for a lower-caste person the desire to write about and engage with the issue of caste.[5] In other words, we have here two competing sets of languages dealing with the issue of caste. One talks of caste by other means; the other talks of caste on its 'own terms'. My attempt below is to understand the implication of these two sets of languages for the play of identities in the public sphere under the long shadow of modernity.

A Colonial Story

First, let us look at the historical conditions that facilitated and made possible these two competing modes of talking about caste. This takes us straight to the domain of culture as articulated by dominant Indian nationalism in its battle against colonialism. In an influential formulation, Partha Chatterjee has argued that anti-colonial nationalism marks out the domain of culture or spirituality as 'its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power.'[6] As Chatterjee shows, in the discourse of nationalism, 'The greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain . . . the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture.'[7] In arguing so, Chatterjee departs from Benedict Anderson, who treats anti-colonial nationalism as already imagined in the West, and recovers a space of autonomous national imagination for the colonized. Chatterjee's argument, in displacing the centrality of the West, relocates political agency in the colonized.

While I agree with the new possibilities opened up by Chatterjee's argument about nationalism in the colonial context, if we pluralize 'national community' and 'national culture', the obvious triumph of dominant nationalism over colonialism would simultaneously emerge as the story of domination over varied sections of subaltern social groups within the nation. In other words, if we foreground dominant nationalism in an oppositional dialogue with subaltern social groups within the nation—instead of colonialism—the division between the spiritual and material, the inner and the outer, would tell us other stories: stories of domination and exclusion under the sign of culture and spirituality *within* the so-called national community. That is, the very domain of sovereignty that nationalism carves out in the face of colonial domination is simultaneously a domain for the enforcing of domination over subaltern social groups—such as lower castes, women, and marginal linguistic regions—by the national elite.

When discussing Tarinicharan Chattopadhyay's 'The History of India' Chatterjee notes: 'If the nineteenth-century Englishman could claim ancient Greece as his classical heritage, why should not the English-educated Bengali feel proud of the achievement of the so-called Vedic civilization?'[8] If we keep aside the obvious sense of irony in this statement, what we find is a valorized opposition between colonialism and nationalism. The nationalist invocation of Vedic civilization certainly challenges the claims to supremacy by the colonizers. However, it also carries an unstated hierarchization of the different social groups that make the nation. The normativity of a Vedic civilization, reinvented by dominant nationalism, can accommodate vast sections of Indians only as inferiors within the nation.[9] It is not so much the triumph of non-modular nationalism over colonialism as the inability to exercise hegemony over the life of the nation—and this is where we can locate the source of two competing modes of speaking caste.

I shall illustrate this by journeying through the biography of a prominent public figure in colonial Madras, P.S. Sivaswami Aiyer (1864—1946). Among other things, Sivaswami Aiyer was Assistant Professor

at Madras Law College (1893—9), Joint Editor of the *Madras Law Journal* (1893—1907), Member of the Madras Legislative Council, and Vice-Chancellor of Madras University (1916—18).[10] In keeping with his pre-eminent location in this modernized colonial public, his life in the material domain was governed by what one may term the canons or protocols of Western modernity. A telling instance of this was the way Sivaswami Aiyer organized his time: 'daily walks, hours set apart for reading newspapers or magazines, fixed time for bath and food, appointment for interview of visitors, intervals devoted to correspondence and private accounts and family affairs—these made up Sivaswamy Aiyer's well arranged routine.'[11] As one of his lifelong friends, C.R. Narayana Rao, put it: 'his habits [were] regulated by clocks and watches.'[12]

However, this modern selfhood of Sivaswami Aiyer in the material domain accounts for only part of his life. The rest was one of 'tradition':

> In his personal habits he never changed much from the Indian tradition even after his long tours in foreign lands. As a matter of fact, the reason why he spent extra money on a personal attendant throughout his long tours was his anxiety not to depend on food and victuals supplied at foreign hotels . . . In his life he had hardly any occasion to have food outside except at intimate friends' places on invitation. His bath at stated time, performance of Sandhyavandanam in the morning, afternoon and evening, annual observances of Sraddhas for his parents—all connoted the immutability of time-honoured regulations that he respected. All religious festivals and special fasts were observed by him . . . Religious expositions from Srimad Bhagavata or Devi Bhagavata used to be conducted by some learned pundits and listened to with faith by his wife and himself. Brahmins were fed in his house in the ancient manner with all the paraphernalia of a Hindu ritual.[13]

Here we have a description of what the author claims is 'Indian tradition'. It includes, among other things, notions of pollution, Sandhya- vandanam, Sraddhas, Srimad Bhagavata, Devi Bhagavata, and

the feeding of Brahmins. In short, what gets encoded here as Indian culture is culture as defined by Brahmins and the upper castes. The logic of exclusion from, and the inferiorization of, lower-caste 'traditions' within this so-called national tradition are too obvious to require elaboration. Let me also mention here that the book which carries this description of 'Indian tradition' is published by the Government of India in its 'Builders of Modern India' series.

T.K. Venkatarama Sastri, one of his early juniors, captured the walking hybridity that Sivaswami Aiyer was: 'In the very first week came my test. One night he put into my hands Ruskin's "Sesame and Lilies" and asked me to read the title of the book. When I read "Sesame" as a word of three syllables, I passed the first test. He was very punctilious about pronunciation . . . Another night he bade me to read the Bhagavata Purana, a favourite study of his. After I had read it for some time, he took it back and read it with feeling . . .'[14] This seemingly effortless coexistence of Ruskin and Bhagavata Purana in the everyday world of Sivaswami Aiyer in colonial Tamilnadu can of course be written as a straightforward story of resistance to colonialism. This is, indeed, the way elite Indian nationalism scripted the story by working through the binaries of spiritual/material, inner/outer, valorizing the inner or spiritual as the uncolonized site of national selfhood. But this has, naturally, a rather less triumphal implication for the subaltern classes.

First of all, courting the West in the material domain by means of accessing English education, falling in line with its strictures on time discipline, participating in the language of law, and so on, provided the Indian elite with the means to take part in colonial structures of authority, even if only as subordinates of the colonizers. Often such authority, working itself through the language of English and disciplinary institutions like the court of law, meant for subordinate social groups within the 'national community' a compelling moment of exclusion and disempowerment. For instance, *Pradabha Mudaliar Charitram* (1879), the first novel in Tamil, talks of the effect of conducting court proceedings in English for ordinary people: 'They

returned home without any gain like a blind man who went to watch theatre and like a deaf man who went to listen to Music.'[15]

Simultaneously, the so-called sovereign domain of culture uncolonized by the West remained a domain in order to affirm elite uppercaste culture/spirituality as *the* culture of the nation. We have already seen this via Sivaswami Aiyer's spirituality. Such mobilizations of one part of the national to stand for the whole not only inferiorized vast sections of lower castes as inadequate citizens-in-the-making,[16] they also significantly *delegitimized the language of caste in the domain of politics by annexing it as part of the cultural*. Only by unsettling the boundaries between the spiritual and material, the inner and the outer, could the lower castes (and women) contest the logic of exclusion inherent in this so-called national culture, and talk about caste in the colonial public sphere.

The intersection between the unsettling of boundaries between spiritual and material on the one hand, and on the other the efforts of dominant nationalism to enforce this very boundary, is the point at which we can trace the arrival of the two modes of talking about caste that I mentioned earlier. In fact, much of the politics of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy and Babasaheb Ambedkar can be read as an effort to unsettle the boundary between the spiritual and the material, and recover a space for the language of caste in the colonial public sphere. However, an even more interesting story is how mainstream nationalists, confronting this language of caste in the domain of politics, responded.

In 1933 the municipality of Pollachi, a small town in western Tamilnadu, introduced a regulation to do away with hotel dining spaces customarily marked out for Brahmins to eat separated from non-Brahmins. Sivaswami Aiyer opposed this move, claiming it was interference in personal matters.[17] Here is an obvious case of pushing caste back into the inner domain of culture. Most often, however, caste proved recalcitrant; once brought out into the public domain, it refused to heed nationalist advice. It stayed on, speaking its own language, even if from marginal and stigmatized spaces.

Because it demonstrates such stubbornness, caste often gets written off or written out as a part of the colonial strategy of divide-and-rule. Seen as fragmenting the anti-imperial struggle, every invocation of caste in the domain of politics is thus reflexively stigmatized. The nationalisms of E.V. Ramasamy and Ambedkar remain suspect even today; within dominant nationalist thinking, such proponents of the struggle against the stranglehold of caste become and forever remain 'collaborators' of the British.[18] At another level, in the effort to shut out the language of caste from the public sphere, caste gets transcoded as a modern institution. Take the case of untouchability. An avalanche of publications in the first half of the twentieth century explained away untouchability by resorting to a discourse on hygiene. P.V. Jagadisa Aiyyar, whose monograph *South Indian Customs* (1925) remains in print even today, says:

> The Indian custom of observing distance pollution, etc., has hygienic and sanitary considerations in view. In general the so-called pious and religious people are generally most scrupulously clean and hence contact with people of uncleanly habits is nauseating to them . . . people living on unwholesome food such as rotten fish, flesh, garlic, etc., as well as the people of filthy and unclean habits throw out of their bodies coarse and unhealthy magnetism. This affects the religious people of pure habits and diet injuriously. So they keep themselves at a safe distance which has been fixed by the sages of old after sufficient experience and experiment.[19]

This quotation is interesting on several counts. There seems not a moment within it for the existence and acknowledgement of caste. The upper castes get encoded as 'pious and religious people' and 'religious people of pure habits'. The lower castes are encoded as 'people living on rotten fish, flesh, garlic, etc.' Fish, flesh, and garlic are all taboo in the world of the Brahmin and certain other upper castes. Interestingly, Jagadisa Aiyyar invokes not merely experience but experimentation as well: the authority of experimentation summons science to validate caste pollution.[20]

In other contexts caste, in formulations by upper castes and dominant nationalists, reincarnates itself as the necessary or naturally required division of labour. Though one may summon any number of instances as illustration, this excerpt from an editorial— appropriately titled 'How Caste Helps?', in *New India,* the journal of the Theosophical Society edited by Annie Besant—may suffice: 'However much we may declaim against the thraldom of caste in details, the fundamental four divisions of men are so much part of the natural order of things that they will remain as long as servants and traders and soldiers and teachers perform their duties amongst us.' And further: '. . . caste in itself is not peculiar to India, but is found everywhere. Servers, merchants, fighters and rulers, priests, every people has them, though the name is different according to the Nation.'[21] Annie Besant, a vociferous defender of Brahminism who tried her best to wreck non-Brahmin political mobilization in the Madras Presidency, here naturalizes caste by assimilating it within a supposedly universal structure of the division of labour, denying it any socio-historical specificity. Her dual intent—naturalizing caste and denying it specificity —is to invalidate caste as a relevant category in the public sphere and politics.

In tracing the historical moment of the arrival of two distinct ways or modes of talking about caste in the Indian public sphere during colonialism, two key points need to be kept in mind: first, the nationalist resolution, founded on a division between spiritual and material, renders illegitimate the mode by which caste can be spoken of on its own terms in the material/public sphere. Second, its response to those who still chose the language of caste in the domain of politics by crossing the divide between the spiritual and material is to mobilize modernity (hygiene; the division of labour; etc.) and nation to demonize the language of caste and suggest its illegitimacy. This intimacy between modernity and the desire to keep caste out of the public sphere had its own particular career in post-colonial India, to which I now turn.

Postcolonial Angst

With the end of colonial rule, the ambivalence towards the modern, exhibited by the Indian nationalist elite during the colonial period, withered. Now it is modernity on the terms of the 'nation' itself. The character of this new journey along the path of the modern by the Indian nation-state has been captured by Partha Chatterjee: 'The modern state, embedded as it is within the universal narrative of capital, cannot recognize within its jurisdiction any form of community except the single, determinate, demographically enumerable form of the nation.'[22] However, it is important here to recognize that this very opposition between the state (and/or capital) and the community would make community indispensable for the articulation of the nation. After all, only by recognizing the presence of communities can the nation-state deny their legitimacy and affirm the nation. This simultaneous inseparability and antagonism between the modern state and community is of critical importance to understand the politics of two modes of talking about caste in post-colonial India.[23]

When exploring this connection the writings of M.N. Srinivas, who was committed at once to the developmental state and sociology,[24] are most helpful. Let us examine his much-hyped theory of sanskritization and westernization. Stripped down to its basics, the theory, within a comparative framework, claims that the lower castes sanskritize and the upper castes westernize.[25] Taking a cue from Johannes Fabian's argument about how the West constructs its Other by 'the denial of coevalness',[26] we can immediately locate a teleological scheme within Srinivas's comparative analysis. The teleology moves from lower-caste practices to sanskritization to westernization. It is a teleology that sets caste as the Other of the modern. But what we need to remember here is that what looks like the unmarked modern is in fact stealthily upper caste in its orientation. What Srinivas offers us as the history of westernization in India is eminently instructive:

> Only a tiny fraction of the Indian population came into direct, fact-to-face contact with the British or other Europeans, and those who came into such contact did not always become a force for change. Indian servants of the British, for instance, probably wielded some

> influence among their kin groups and local caste groups but not among others. They generally came from the low castes, their Westernization was of a superficial kind, and the upper castes made fun of their Pidgin English, their absurd admiration for their employers, and the airs they gave themselves. Similarly, converts to Christianity from Hinduism did not exercise much influence as a whole because first, these also came from the low castes, and second, the act of conversion often only changed the faith but not the customs, the general culture, or the standing of the converts in society.[27]

Clearly, for Srinivas, the source of the Indian modern cannot be the lower castes. Their attempts could only remain superficial, trapped in pidgin English and an absurd admiration of their employers. Interestingly, this is one of several paragraphs in Srinivas's book which refuses the distinction between his own view and that of others whom he is talking about.

Let me stay with this theme a while longer. In the course of his book Srinivas gives us a list of the 'Westernised intelligentsia' who were, in his words, 'the torchbearers of a new and modern India.' The list runs as follows: Tagore, Vivekananda, Ranade, Gokhale, Tilak, Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Radhakrishnan.[28] Let us for the moment not get caught in the question of how complex figures like Gandhi find a place in this list of a westernized intelligentsia. What is of interest here is the conspicuous absence of those who courted the modern for the mobilization of the lower castes, Babasaheb Ambedkar and Periyar E.V. Ramasamy being the most glaring instances. It is evident that the Indian modern, despite its claim to universality—and of course because of it—not only constitutes the lower castes as its Other but also silently inscribes itself as upper caste. Thus, caste as the Other of the modern is coded forever and solely as a characteristic of the lower castes.[29]

Given this particular character of the Indian modern, it proscribes and stigmatizes the language of caste in the public sphere. It does so even while it talks of caste by other means. In understanding the politics of this authorized language of the public sphere, we are helped

yet again by Srinivas. It was thanks to Edmund Leach that Srinivas, who spoke all the time about caste in general but never about his own, happened to speak of his caste identity. It happened this way: in a review of Srinivas's *Caste in Modern India*, Leach called his sanskritization model 'Brahminocentric' and taunted Srinivas over whether his interpretation would have been different had he been a Sudra.[30] Analogous with the incitement that rabid Christians and non-Brahmins occasioned in the acknowledgement of his upper-caste identity by R.K. Narayan, this incitement by Leach prompted Srinivas to concede his own caste identity:

> . . . my stressing of the importance of the Backward Classes Movement, and of the role of caste in politics and administration, are very probably the result of my being a South Indian, and a Brahmin at that. The principle of caste quotas for appointments to posts in the administration, and for admissions to scientific and technological courses, produced much bitterness among Mysore Brahmins. Some of these were my friends and relatives, and I could not help being sensitive to their distress.[31]

This is familiar enough. The distress of the Brahmin is the theme song of the post-Mandal modern public sphere in India. Srinivas, to his credit, speaks of it even earlier. But what is quite illuminating here is that, as soon as he confesses his caste identity (with the caveat 'very probably' thrown in), he hastens to enfeeble it. In the place of his sensitivity to the distress of Mysore Brahmins, he now presents a range of things that has nothing to do with caste as such as the reason for his opposition to caste quotas. He could not help being sensitive 'to the steady deterioration in efficiency and the fouling of interpersonal relations in academic circles and the administration—both results of a policy of caste quotas. As one with a strong attachment to Mysore, I could not but be affected by the manner in which conflicts between castes prevented concentration on the all-important task of developing the economic resources of the State for the benefit of all sections of its population.'[32]

Srinivas emerges here at one level as one of 'those "experts" on caste who consider it their duty to protect caste from the pollution of politics.'[33] Here is a torrent of words—'decline of efficiency', 'fouling of interpersonal relations', 'the benefit of all sections of the population'—all conspiring to keep caste out of public articulation. In the heart of all of this is lodged the well-known principle of 'the common good' as a civic ideal. As the feminist and other minoritarian critiques of this civic republican ideal of 'the common good' have shown, the deployment of this common good as the so-called democratic ideal elbows out the politics of difference based on inferiorized identities and sports the interests of the powerful as those of society as a whole. As Chantal Mouffe has argued, 'all form of Consensus are by necessity based on acts of exclusion.'[34]

However, this is not merely a story of interests, but of democracy and its articulation in the public sphere. The deracinated language of 'the common good' comes in the way of the formation of an inclusive public sphere. The pressure exerted by the modern most often forces the subordinated castes into silence and self-hate. D.R. Nagaraj, a fellow traveller and scholar of the Dalit movement in Karnataka, notes: 'The birth of the modern individual in the humiliated communities is not only accompanied by a painful severing of ties with the community, but also a conscious effort to alter one's past is an integral part of it.'[35] The moving story of Nanasaheb Wankhede, as recounted by Vasant Moon, then a deputy county commissioner in Nagpur, is instructive too: 'We went to the house of Nanasaheb Wankhede, the retired deputy county commissioner . . . Nanasaheb was an extremely warm person, but he lived completely apart from the community. He didn't care to mix with me even as a deputy commissioner.' He told Moon, a fellow Mahar, that displaying books on Ambedkar and Buddhism would land him in trouble. But when the news of Ambedkar's death was brought to Wankhede, 'he broke into tears.'[36] It is not words of dialogue in the public, but moments of despair in the private, that the Indian modern offers the lower castes. It discursively demands and socio-historically forces caste to live out its secret lives outside the public sphere.

The response of the Indian modern, when an insurrection by the prohibited language of caste occurs in the public sphere, illuminates the contradictory relationship between modernity and mass politics. The year 1990, when the prime minister V.P. Singh decided to implement a part of the Mandal Commission Report, was such a moment. The response of Ashok Mitra, well-known Marxist and a believer in 'People's Democracy', within this context is illustrative. His modern selfhood is not in doubt at all. He claims revealingly: 'The government's decision . . . represents the ultimate triumph of the message of Babasaheb Ambedkar over the preachings of secularists.'[37] Sullied by the language of caste, Ambedkar cannot be part of the secular-modern. Mitra goes on, as a Marxist, to enumerate certain national ills which are, for him, more real—such as the misdistribution of arable land, near-universal illiteracy, and general lack of healthcare. Centuries of caste oppression simply do not exist for him or do not much matter if they do; they are at any rate, in the last instance, refused a place in his secular-modern reckoning.[38]

Then come Mitra's ruminations on mass politics: 'For the nation's majority, the oppressive arrangements the system has spawned are little different from what obtained under medieval feudalism. With just one exception, medieval tyrants did not have to worry about votes. Modern leaders have to. They cannot therefore ignore pressure groups, who claim to speak on behalf of neglected classes or sections. These groups have to be taken at their face value for they supposedly represent solid vote banks. Revolutions are not next door, but the threat of votes withheld, or being hawked around to other bidders, works.'[39] The simultaneous disenchantment of the Indian modern (even in its Marxist incarnation) with the language of caste as well as that of mass politics is all too transparent here. A perceptive comment about the doctrinaire modernist made three decades back by Rajni Kothari still holds true: 'Those in India who complain of "casteism in politics" are really looking for a sort of politics which has no basis in society. They also probably lack any clear conception of either the nature of politics

or the nature of the caste system (many of them would want to throw out both politics and the caste system).'[40]

Conclusion

In concluding let me dwell briefly on how the Indian modern's revolt against democracy has shaped lower-caste responses. In their response, the modern is both mobilized and critiqued, for the promises of modernity and what it delivers in practice are often in contradiction. A fragment from the real-life story of how Kumud Pawde, a Mahar woman, became proficient in Sanskrit, is a good instance for exploring the distinguishing features of these responses.

It is a story of intense struggle, discouragement, and ridicule. However, Kumud Pawde pursues Sanskrit with determination, gets a postgraduate degree, and teaches Sanskrit in a college. Gokhale Guruji, an orthodox Brahmin, was an exemplary teacher: her caste did not matter to him. But when she began her M.A. course in Sanskrit another professor came into the picture:

> The Head of the department was a scholar of all-India repute. He didn't like my learning Sanskrit, and would make it clear that he didn't. And he took a malicious delight in doing so . . . I would unconsciously compare him with Gokhale Guruji. I couldn't understand why this great man with a doctorate, so renowned all over India, this man in his modern dress, who did not wear the traditional cap, who could so eloquently delineate the philosophy of the Universal Being, and with such ease explain difficult concepts in simple terms, could not practice in real life the philosophy in the books he taught. This man had been exposed to modernity; Gokhale Guruji was orthodox. Yet one had been shrivelled by tradition, the other enriched by it . . .[41]

Here is anguish from a Dalit woman of great accomplishment over how to delineate the meaning of the modern and the non-modern in the context of caste. Modern experience and modern expectation are obviously at loggerheads.[42] But it would be a mistake to read this as the

lower-caste rejection of modernity. It is at once a critique of the modern for its failure as well as an invitation to it to deliver on its promises. The lower castes' relation to modernity is perhaps best described by the phrase 'antagonistic indebtedness'—a felicitous term used by Paul Gilroy in the context of Black politics.[43]

It is by critiquing and rejecting the civilizational claims of modernity that the lower castes, at one level, have been able to claim a space for their politics. The vast corpus of literature produced by Dalit intellectuals in Tamilnadu during the past decade is illustrative here. For instance, Raj Gowthaman, one of the leading Tamil intellectuals and a Dalit literary critic, rejects the civilizational claims and teleology of modernity. Instead he recuperates the pasts of lowly hill cultivators, hunters, fisher people, pastoralists, and the like as the high point of human achievement. He characterizes their social life as communal, with people pooling together and sharing food with a sense of equality, without much internal differentiation. The flow of history ceases to be civilizing and Gowthaman asks Dalits to step outside it. In carrying forward his agenda of carving out a space for those who are outside the pale of civilization in Indian modern's reckoning, he argues that one needs to resignify as positive those cultural practices that are deemed lowly by the upper castes. Beef-eating, drinking, and speaking in a Dalit dialect are necessarily part of this cultural politics.[44] The need to reclaim what has been stigmatized is essential because that alone may end the self-hate that the Indian modern has produced in the lower castes. Like Nagaraj, Gowthaman is aware that the lure of the Indian modern is capable of silencing them: 'We could see the elements of these protest cultures disappearing among those Dalits who have migrated to urban areas seeking education and jobs . . . We could see the Dalits avoiding and covering up these counter-cultural elements because of the consciousness that they are uncivilized.'[45]

It is evident that this new political project is addressed to the lower castes. And it gives rise to a sphere of politics outside the modern civil society/public sphere. The very appellation 'Dalit' attached to everything that takes place in this sphere signals it.[46] The refusal to

concede the demands of Indian upper-caste modernity to hide and at once practise caste has almost by itself ensured this subaltern counter-public.[47] And this is a public where the language of caste, instead of the language of speaking caste by other means, is validated, encouraged, and practised.

However, it should not be forgotten that this is a public which is simultaneously in constant dialogue with that modern civil society which, in its invocation of modernity, has and continues to resist the articulation of lower-caste politics. We know that most often this dialogue about the new sphere of politics takes place via the sheer despair and condemnation expressed in modern civil society. The response which the arrival of Dalit literature and Dalit literary criticism in Tamilnadu has brought forth from *avant garde* little magazines is a case in point. For instance, responding to the claim that Dalit writings constitute a separate literary genre, Tamil Selvan, an activist of the cultural front of the CPI (M) and a Thevar by caste, notes in anger: '. . . stop your pointless howling. Some professors are organising here and there conferences [on Dalit literature]. They rebuke others. They try to impose on others' heads what is in their heads. These are unnecessary conflicts.' In a move perhaps inspired by Marxism towards conflict resolution he suggest to Dalit writers: 'Give up your pointless howling . . . [Instead] produce serious writing.'[48] In other words, the subaltern counter-public, in extracting the response of the modern authorized public sphere with its upper-caste protocols, is engaged in an antagonistic dialogue with the Indian modern. Equally important is the fact that this sphere of politics outside modern civil society is in constant dialogue, collaboration, and discord with the other strand of lower-caste politics which mobilizes modernity and speaks a language of universal freedom.

This contradictory engagement with modernity by the lower castes has an important message for all of us: that is, being one step outside modernity alone can guarantee us a public where the politics of difference can articulate itself, and caste can emerge as a legitimate

category of democratic politics. Being one step outside modernity is indeed being one step ahead of modernity.

14

The Creation of a Lower-Caste Identity in History and Popular Culture, 1869-1873*

ROSALIND O'HANLON

Chapter 7: Ritual Status and Political Conflict in Later-Nineteenth-Century Maharashtra

Following his retirement from the managing committee of the schools for the lower castes in 1858, Phule devoted himself in the early 1860s to a variety of social-reform campaigns. He took part in the first attempts in Pune to liberalize attitudes towards the remarriage of widows.[1] In 1863 he made an even bolder move with the opening of a 'Home for the prevention of infanticide'. Here, high-caste widows who had become pregnant could come and give birth in secret and return quietly to their families, leaving the babies at the home. Posters and handbills advertised the home, which quickly collected about thirty-five infants. The survival rate amongst the children was very poor, however, and Phule's great-nephew Gajananrao reported that most of them died before the age of 5.[2] Phule and his wife Savitribai, without children of their own, adopted one of these, a boy named Yashavantrao, the son of a Brahman widow.

Phule supported these efforts by setting up in business. He had inherited a small amount of money from his father's second wife, which

he invested in a metalwork shop in Pune. He became the agent for his friend Vasudev Babaji Navarange, who had been to London in 1863 to make contacts for the sale of metal-casting equipment.[3] Phule built up a great trade selling this equipment to factories in Pune. He employed two servants at his shop, which grew to a daily turnover of about Rs 100.[4] This business laid the foundation for the material prosperity which later enabled Phule to devote himself to the lower-caste cause.

Between 1869 and 1873 Phule entered on a major new period of literary and polemical activity. In these crucial four years he constructed a new critique of orthodox religion, and the social structures that it had helped to produce in western Indian society under British rule. This provided the ideological basis for the rest of his life's work and sketched out the framework within which the non-Brahman movement was later to conduct its debates.

The three major works of this period were, in order of their publication, *A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale,* published in June 1869 in Bombay; *Priestcraft Exposed,* published later in the same year, and *Slavery,* published in 1873. He also wrote a much smaller piece, *Brahman Teachers in the Education Department*, which was published in the Christian journal *Satyadipika* in June 1869.

A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale consisted ostensibly of a celebration of the exploits of the seventeenth-century Maratha warrior. Its underlying purpose was to recruit the figure of Shivaji for the construction of a collective identity for all lower castes. The ballad placed Shivaji within a startlingly new and overtly anti-Brahman interpretation of Maharashtra's history and culture. It represented the *Shudras* and *ati-Shudras* as the forgotten descendants of the heroic race of *Kshatriyas* of ancient India, led by the mythical Daitya King Bali. These had been subdued by Brahmans at the time of the Aryan invasions, and had remained subject to Brahman domination ever since. Phule supported this interpretation by deriving the term *Kshatriya* from the Marathi word *kshetra,* a field or place. The former term had originally denoted all those living peaceably together on the land before the arrival of the Brahman invaders. Phule used the

ambiguities of Shivaji's own *varna* status to support his argument of the original *Kshatriya* identity of all *Shudras,* now concealed in the fictions of a Brahmanic religious hierarchy. He drew a parallel between Shivaji and the mythical King Bali as the leaders of the lower castes against external oppressors.

The collection of ballads entitled *Priestcraft Exposed* began with an account of the idyllic pre-Aryan realm of King Bali, and its invasion by Aryan Brahmans. It went on to describe how Brahman priests in nineteenth-century Maharashtrian society exploited its ignorant and illiterate peasant cultivators. *Brahman Teachers in the Education Department* was also a ballad. It depicted the dominance of Brahmans in the educational institutions of the British administration, their discouragement of the lower castes from educating themselves, and their hypocrisy in parading their social progressiveness before the British in order to win favours and employment while clinging in private to their idolatrous religious practices and their unregenerate caste pride. In choosing the ballad or *pavada* verse form, Phule attempted to place his work within the mainstream of Maharashtra's rich oral tradition.

Slavery was a long prose work. It began with an introduction in English, describing the Aryan invasions and the subsequent history of Brahman oppression in India. It followed this with an appeal to the British government to check the power of Brahmans in the administration by popular education and the employment of non-Brahmans. The book continued with a Marathi introduction describing in detail the sufferings of the original *Kshatriyas* at the hands of the Brahman invaders, comparing the former to the negro slaves in America. The main text was cast as a dialogue between Phule himself and one 'Dhondiba', and was divided into sixteen parts.[5] In the first nine, Phule rewrote many of the central episodes of Hindu religious mythology—the incarnations of Vishnu; the story of King Bali and the dwarf, Vaman; the story of Parashuram's extirpation of the *Kshatriyas.* He argued that these represented the real history of ancient India, deliberately garbled by later Brahman writers in order to conceal their

misdeeds and consolidate their power over the lower castes. He supported this by reinterpreting central elements in the social structure and popular culture of nineteenth-century Maharashtra, and arguing them to be survivals from this remote period. In the tenth and eleventh parts of the book, Phule turned to more recent events, in the revival of Brahmanic authority after its eclipse by Buddhism. He suggested that in India, as in every part of the world, popular heroes had always arisen to protect the weak from oppressive authority in the way that King Bali had tried to do, and gave Christ and the Buddha as examples. The last parts of the work were devoted to a minute analysis of the position which Phule argued Brahmans had built up for themselves under British rule, the power that this gave them over the masses of lower-caste Hindus, and the way in which the British government had allowed real power to slip from its hands into those of the high-caste administrative and professional elite which served it.

Ritual Status and the Reinterpretation of Tradition

Phule thus waged his ideological battle on two fronts. He attacked what he thought to be the secular power of Brahmans as an administrative elite by urging the education and employment of the lower castes, and by seeking to inform the British government of what he felt to be the designs of its Brahman employees. He did not simply demand jobs for the lower castes in the British administration. He argued for a radical restructuring of that administration itself, and for the transfer of greater power into the hands of sympathetic British administrators, so that the lower castes might be re-educated to a set of values more secular and egalitarian than those represented in Brahmanic religion. He regarded this as the prerequisite for all other forms of liberation for the lower castes.

This brings us to the second part of Phule's strategy; the provision of an ideological basis on which a potential popular following might be brought to reject the religious hierarchies of conventional Hindu society. He felt that these hierarchies derived their strength from their roots in the most important Hindu religious accounts of the origins of Indian society and its proper divisions, and in the prescriptions which

this literature contained for the social life of the pious Hindu. In particular, he argued that the strongest hold of religious tradition on the people derived from the extensive integration of Hindu religious literature into the popular culture and oral traditions of Maharashtra. Phule's answer to this was to provide alternative accounts of the texts, myths, and stories most common in popular Hinduism. He linked these with important symbols and structures from contemporary Maharashtrian society in order to convey the real community of culture and interest that united all lower castes against their historical and cultural adversaries: the Brahmans. In his projection of this division, Phule drew skilfully on the traditions of martial heroism and identification with the land that were already prominent in popular culture. Chapter 2 [of my book has] outlined the tensions that existed between these local traditions and important sections of Brahman opinion in the Deccan. While the latter denied that any real *Kshatriyas* were left after the wars between Parashuram and the *Kshatriyas*, described in puranic literature, Maharashtra's history of military success had always encouraged claims to a *Kshatriya* status from groups with the power and resources to do so. At the same time, this local tradition, centred on the twin symbols of the warrior and the tiller of the soil, formed a focus for the expression of loyalty and identification, making a model for social aspiration for much wider circles in rural society. Moreover, the very disputes between Brahmans and Marathas earlier in the century, together with the criteria for elite status then established, and the relaxation of caste discipline under British rule, had acted to intensify aspirations to a Maratha *Kshatriya* identity throughout the *Maratha-kunbi* complex of castes.

In arguing that all lower castes could rightfully call themselves *Kshatriya,* Phule was able to harness the impetus of an existing process of upward social mobility to a very unconventional and radical end: that of suggesting a permanent and irreconcilable hostility between Brahmans and all other lower castes in society. The portrayal of this division was lent verisimilitude by representing the character of Parashuram, invoked by Brahmans themselves as the chief argument against Maratha claims of *Kshatriya* status, as the actual historical

antagonist of the *Kshatriyas* of ancient India. The resulting ambiguity in non-Brahman ideology was thereafter a great source of strength to the non-Brahman movement, and a great weakness. It was a source of strength in that it allowed the retention of traditional loyalties and aspirations in a new radical guise. It was a weakness in that there was always the possibility of a slip back into a simple Sanskritizing claim without any of the qualifying radicalism of Phule's own thought.

The idea of an original *Kshatriya* identity for the lower castes bears a very obvious similarity to the myths of a high status, now lost, that are a common feature of the culture of low and untouchable castes.[6] But Phule's was an origin myth with a difference. Rather than limiting himself to the history of a particular caste, his account projected a central historical and cultural tradition for Maharashtra itself. This tradition was shaped and given meaning by the struggles of Maharashtra's lower castes, her warriors and peasant cultivators. In creating this idea of a continuous and distinctive 'tradition', Phule also took into account the need for a reinterpretation of symbols. As we saw, some of the most important symbols in western Indian culture were the land and the peasant-cultivator, the warrior, and the figure of Shivaji himself. These symbols were, however, 'unassigned', in the sense that they were not the exclusive preserve of any particular caste group. Phule attempted to appropriate them definitively for the lower castes.

The implications of this ideological effort went far beyond the ritual status of the lower castes to impinge upon the concrete relations of power between these castes and other groups in society. Both to the lower castes, who represented Phule's hoped-for constituency, and to the British government, Phule projected Maharashtra's warriors and cultivators as the real substance of her society. To these, the true *Kshatriyas* of the nineteenth century, belonged the position of social power and political leadership that Brahmans had assumed under British rule. As the largest group in society, the providers of material support in times of peace and of protection in war, their support and advancement formed the first duty of the British government.

It is noteworthy that Phule did not attempt to recruit what might have been the most obvious symbol for a 'tradition' of Maharashtra—the title 'Maratha' itself. He feared that too much emphasis on a Maratha status might set up barriers between Maratha-*kunbis* and other lower castes. It might amount in real terms to little more than an assertion of the right to wear the sacred thread, and to have rituals and ceremonies conducted with Vedic texts, as befitted members of the *Kshatriya varna*. Phule preferred the idea of a community of *Shudras,* and employed the notion of an older *Kshatriya* status as a means of laying claim to social priority and political leadership.

From the 1880s, the polemicists of the developing non-Brahman movement at once reflected and transformed Phule's ideological concerns. The attempt to identify and appropriate a central 'tradition' of Maharashtra became one of their central ideological enterprises. The difference was that most of these non-Brahman polemicists attempted to appropriate the title of 'Maratha' itself, with all its attendant power, not yet exclusively assigned to any social group. They identified the term exclusively with the lower castes, and made it the very symbol of Maharashtra's 'tradition'. For all the contributions which other groups might have made to its history and culture, Maharashtra was, in the end, the Marathas. Like Phule's *Kshatriya* mythology, this attempt to identify the term 'Maratha' with the whole *Maratha-kunbi* complex and associated castes, and to exclude Brahmans, both reflected the growth of popular aspirations to an elite identity, and incorporated them in a programme for mass lower-caste mobilization. This resulted in the large-scale extension of the title 'Maratha' that formed so marked a feature of lower-caste social structure from the end of the century.

This great ideological effort, originating with Phule, sparked off a debate within western Indian society that lasted well into the next century, and that dominated the exchanges between non-Brahmans and the early nationalists. Attempts to project and capture a 'tradition' of Maharashtra became the preoccupation of ideologues and polemicists from a whole variety of groups on either side. This debate was at its most obvious in the rival interpretations of the figure of Shivaji that gathered strength from the 1880s. The prizes in this ideological conflict

were solid and real. It was by creating such 'traditions', and appropriating existing symbols to them, that politicians were able to gain access to mass popular loyalties, and to influence the social and economic policies of the British government. However, each group approached these issues with very different ideological resources with which to appropriate and reinterpret existing symbols, and each sought divergent and often conflicting policies from the government.

Chapter 8: The Aryan Invasions and the Origins of Caste Society

Brahman Myths and the Discovery of Low-Caste Identity

Phule depicted Brahmans as the descendants of Aryan invaders who had conquered the indigenous people of India. The Brahmans had usurped the inhabitants' rightful power and property, and had imposed their religion as an instrument of social control designed to perpetuate their rule. This formed the central polemical device in Phule's explanation of the sufferings of the lower castes. It was through this argument that he was able to deny the legitimacy of Brahmanic religious authority, to assert the hidden *Kshatriya* identity of all lower castes, and to reinterpret the most important stories, figures, and symbols in popular Hinduism from a new and radical perspective. In this interpretation of ancient Indian history, it is clear that he had drawn very heavily on missionary accounts and in particular on the arguments of John Wilson's work *India Three Thousand Years Ago.*

Phule described how 'the Aryan progenitors of the present Brahman race' came originally from a region beyond the Indus, attracted by the proverbial wealth of India and the fertility of its land. They met with fierce resistance from the original inhabitants whom they subjugated, and traces of this ancient struggle were still to be seen in the terminology used to describe the lower castes in the present day, The term *Shudras* was popularly used to mean 'low' or 'insignificant' and to denote the lowest of the four *varnas*, while the term 'Mahar' probably derived from the phrase *maha-ari,* meaning 'the great enemy'.[1] Traces of this primeval conflict were also to be found in the religious writings

of the Brahmans, in the accounts of the conflicts between the gods and their enemies, the Daityas, and the *raksas*, or demons, who tried to disrupt their worship. Those whom the Aryans had conquered had been known as *Kshatriyas*, because they had lived on and ruled over the land, or *kshetra*. Brahma and Parashuram were not gods, as their present-day worship implied, but had been real historical figures, leaders in the Aryan onslaught. This had given rise to the story of Parashuram's attack on the *Kshatriyas* and his supposed extirpation of all true *Kshatriyas* from the earth.[2]

However, the Brahmans had been able to conceal this original act of usurpation, and to perpetuate their social privileges and religious authority. They were able to do this by their invention of the caste system, and the rights and duties that it assigned. Brahman writers gave these invidious social distinctions the force of religious law: 'In order to fulfil their plan that those people should remain perpetually in slavery, and that they should be able to live comfortably on what the Shudras earned by the sweat of their brow, the Brahmans set up the fiction of caste divisions, and made up several books on it for their own selfish ends.'[3]

The institution of untouchability derived from the same conflict. The Mahars and Mangs of present-day society were only those whose ancestors had put up the fiercest resistance to the Brahman invaders. As a result, the Brahman rulers had singled them out for the special punishment of untouchability, and in the poverty caused by their exile from society they had taken to eating dead carcasses. The respectable non-Brahman castes responded to this exactly as the Brahmans wished: 'They did not realize that their ancestors were all of one house, and that the Brahmans had ruined the Mahars and Mangs in this way because they had fought against them with special force. Thus, the Brahmans caused these divisions to be set up, and taught the other castes to hate the Mahars and Mangs.'[4]

In this linking of an idea of the ancient past with some of the central institutions and beliefs of present-day society, Phule injected his polemic with a great emotional power. For a potential low-caste

disciple, the discovery of his real identity, and of the hidden history of his ancestors, was intended to bring about an upheaval in his emotions as well as in his reasoned understanding of his social environment. In the ballad *Priestcraft Exposed*, Phule endowed the same story with an enormous emotional appeal:

> Lawless men leagued together
> They made Brahma their chief
> They plundered and caused chaos
> Beating the people and bringing them to their knees
> Degrading them into slaves
> See, these are the Shudras
> The rest left over, a tiny number
> Rose up and challenged Parashuram
> They took care to remain united
> Of their countrymen, their beloved brothers,
> Many were slain
> The Shudras no longer cared for unity
> The maha-ari attacked Parashuram
> Many women became widows
> Parashuram routed the maha-ari
> In constant fighting he broke their spirit
> He did not spare pregnant women
> He killed the newborn children
> The great enemies of the twice-born
> Came to the end of their strength
> Thrust down and defeated
> Those that were left were punished severely
> Abused as Mangs and maha-aris, great enemies
> See, these are the Kshatriyas of the olden days.[5]

The Incarnations of Vishnu

In this way, many of the most important stories of popular Hindu mythology were but the distorted reflection of the ancient struggle between Brahmans and the *Kshatriyas* of pre-Aryan India. However,

many of these stories lacked the sense of an historical progression that Phule was trying to convey. He therefore chose parts of them that already possessed an element of such linear ordering. He centred his analysis on the ten incarnations of the god Vishnu, representing these as the consecutive stages of the Aryan assault on the land of the ancient *Kshatriyas*. In the Hindu accounts, the first six incarnations of Vishnu are usually represented as: Matsya, the fish; Kurma, the tortoise; Varah, the boar; Narasinha, the man-lion; Vaman, the dwarf; and Parashuram, Rama with the axe. Phule wove these into his account of the invasion of the Aryans.[6] This account took up the first nine chapters of *Slavery*, written in the form of a dialogue between Phule and Dhondiram.

The Aryans had first made their attack in small boats that moved along through the water like fish, *masa* in Marathi. Hence, the nickname of their first leader came to be Matsya. These events were preserved in the popular memory, in a form deliberately garbled by Brahman writers, in the story in the *Bhagavat purana,* of Vishnu having emerged from a fish.[7] The Aryan army mounted its next wave of attack in a larger boat. It was large and slow, resembling a tortoise in its movement. These were the real events behind the story of the second incarnation of Vishnu, given in the *Bhagavat purana.* Here, Vishnu appeared in the form of a tortoise or turtle to recover things of value lost in the deluge.[8]

In the story attached to the third incarnation, that of the boar Varah, a demon named Hiranyaksa had dragged the Earth to the bottom of the sea. Vishnu assumed the form of a boar to recover it, slaying the demon. The truth behind this myth lay in the unpleasant character of this particular leader of the Aryans:

> His nature and behaviour must have been loathsome, and wherever he went he must have won his battles by charging furiously like a wild boar. Therefore the Kshatriyas in the kingdoms of the brave Kings, the brothers Hiranyaksa and Hiranyakasipu called him a wild boar or pig in contempt, and as a result he must have been wild with anger; so he attacked their kingdoms continually, and

inflicted much suffering on all the people living on the kshetras, and in the end, he slew Hiranyaksa in battle.[9]

Varah was followed as the leader of the Aryans by the fourth incarnation of Vishnu, Narasinha, the man-lion. In the popular religious stories concerning Narasinha, Vishnu assumed this form to deliver the world from the tyranny of the Daitya or demon King Hiranyakasipu, the brother of Hiranyaksa. In Phule's account, Narasinha became the cunning and voracious leader of the Aryans, who coveted the kingdom of the *Kshatriya* Hiranyakasipu and slew him to gain it.[10]

Descended from Hiranyakasipu was the greatest leader of the ancient *Kshatriyas,* King Bali. He took steps to unite all the petty *Kshatriya* rulers of India in the effort to resist the Aryans. Vaman, the fifth incarnation of Vishnu, but in reality the new leader of the Aryans, advanced to the frontier of Bali's kingdom, and attacked his population of peaceful cultivators. After a great fight, Bali fell in battle, and his son Banasura was forced to flee. The popular memory of this great struggle found expression in the story of the *Bhagavat purana,* in which Vishnu assumed the form of Vaman, the dwarf, in order to subdue the overmighty Daitya King Bali. Vaman asked Bali, famed for his generosity, for three steps of the Earth. Bali granted this, whereupon Vishnu assumed the form of a giant and took three steps, over the Earth, the sky, and finally on Bali's head, pushing him down into the nether regions.[11]

Phule then broke with the conventional Hindu accounts of the incarnations, and described the next leader of the Aryans as Brahma. The figure of Brahma had, of course, an absolutely central place in the most popular Hindu accounts of the origins of society, and of the most sacred Hindu religious texts. The four *varnas* were usually described as issuing from Brahma's body: the Brahman from his head, the *Kshatriya* from his arms, the *Vaishya* from his stomach, and the *Shudra,* the servant of the other classes, from his feet. This account reflected both the roles and the dignity of the four *varnas* in Hindu society. The Vedas, the oldest and most sacred of the Hindu writings, were conventionally described as having issued from Brahma's mouth. Access to the Vedas

had always been one of the marks by which the twice-born castes were distinguished from those of the *Shudra varna*. It is likely, therefore, that Phule felt that the figure of Brahma had a special importance in the legitimation of conventional religious hierarchies, and represented an important target for reinterpretations. After Vaman died, the lack of a custom of appointing an elder leader among the Aryans gave Brahma his chance. Brahma is represented as the typical popular stereotype of a Brahman, an avaricious, cunning, and secretive clerk: 'There was a very skilful clerk by the name of Brahma, and he began to conduct all the affairs of state. He was extremely cunning, swam with the stream, and achieved his purposes in this way. No one put a scrap of faith in what he said, so the practice must have arisen of calling him the four-faced Brahma.'[12]

Phule integrated the association of the Vedas with Brahma into his account:

> Brahma first invented the practice of scratching on palm leaves with a sharp point, and collected together some magical incantations and false fables that he knew off by heart. He made little poems out of them, like those of the Parsis, in the language that was current everywhere [of which the corruption is Sanskrit] and carefully wrote them out on palm leaves. These then grew to be great popular favourites, and so thus the custom must have arisen of saying that all these stories, together with the knowledge of magical incantation, issued forth out of the mouth of Brahma.[13]

Brahma seized the opportunity created by the death of Banasura to invade his kingdom. In the struggles that followed, a very deep animosity grew between the Brahmans and the ancient *Kshatriyas* that was still echoed in the divisions and exclusions of nineteenth-century society, The prohibition, in the writings of Manu, of the education of *Shudras* arose out of the Brahmans' fear 'lest the Shudras should remember their former greatness, and then rebel against their authority.'[14]

We have already seen the importance of the figure of Parashuram, the sixth incarnation of Vishnu, for Phule's argument. The version of the myth that he gave exploited these themes in popular culture to the full. Parashuram succeeded Brahma as head of the Aryans, whereupon the *maha-ari,* the small groups of *Kshatriyas* left unconquered, 'attacked Parashuram twenty-one times to free their brothers from the hands of the Brahmans, and with such force that they became known as "dvaiti", and the corruption of that word has become "Daitya"'.[15] The Marathi term *dvaiti* means 'one who disagrees'. In this way, he gave a radical interpretation to the term 'Daitya', generally used in the basic myths of the Hindu tradition (as in the example of King Bali) to signify a race of demons who warred against the gods and interfered with sacrifices. Parashuram inflicted a terrible defeat on the *maha-ari*. Their banishment from society formed the orgins of the later institution of untouchability, and of the practice amongst untouchable castes of wearing a black thread around their necks: 'In order that they should never again lift up their hand against the Brahmans, he had a black thread tied around the neck of each of them as a sign, and prohibited even their Shudra brothers from touching them. He introduced the practice of calling these maha-ari Kshatriyas by the names of ati-Shudra, Mahar, antyaj, Mang and Chandal.'[16]

Ritual Knowledge and Special Power

Phule also placed, in the context of his historical account, the learning and knowledge of ritual and the sacred books of Hinduism that formed the proper accomplishment of a Brahman priest. Phule was completely clear about the way in which this monopoly of ritual knowledge operated to maintain the religious authority of the priesthood. It helped to keep the priesthood distinct from a laity that lacked any knowledge even of the language in which it was couched, let alone of its prescriptions for ritual and action; but one which nevertheless believed their importance and efficacy.[17] Phule's strategy here forms an interesting contrast to the missionary attempts to undermine Brahmanic religious authority. They had made freely available many of

the most important Sanskrit texts that had previously been the exclusive property of Brahmans. Phule's tactic was different. He set the special knowledge of Brahman priests, and the distinctive marks of Brahmanhood in general, in the same historical context as the religious myths. When Brahma invaded Bali's kingdom, he issued a white thread to each of his men for the purpose of mutual recognition in case of difficulty, 'which nowadays they call the sacred thread of the Brahmans'.[18] In addition to this: 'He taught to everyone a basic incantation that expressed his position, which nowadays they call the "gayatri mantra", and impressed strictly upon them that whatever happened, they were not to reveal this to the Kshatriyas.' The Brahman warriors also wrote these magical formulae on their weapons before going into battle. After the defeat of the *Kshatriyas,* therefore: 'It was natural that the dread of Brahman knowledge should remain in the minds of all the credulous Kshatriyas.'[19] This ancient struggle had set the pattern for the contemporary control by Brahmans of the knowledge of ritual which occupied such an important place in the lives of the lower castes: 'From all this, the bhat Brahmans cheat and deceive the ignorant Malis and kunbis with their rituals, repetitions of the name of god and their knowledge of magical formulae even in these enlightened times.'[20]

Phule also used the dating of different texts to point out the real status of the writings upon which the special power of the priest depended. Here again, it is clear that he has drawn on the arguments of missionary propaganda, hoping to affect a potential audience, in much the same way as Baba Padmanji found his belief in the divine origins of the Vedas, and in the power of the priest that repeated them, undermined when he read that the Vedas could be dated in human terms.[21] Phule asked why it was that if the four Vedas issued from the mouth of Brahma, the later interpolations of the *rshis,* ancient Hindu sages, could be found in them. He also explained that internal evidence within the writings of Manu made it certain that it had been written well after the *Bhagavat purana,* contrary to the former's reputation for a greater antiquity.[22]

Here, then, Phule presented an explanation of Brahman learning, its exclusiveness and portentous secrecy, that could be taken up by any low-caste Hindu who was determined to deny that such enormous religious power could rest exclusively in the hands of one group. Phule concluded his account in *Slavery* by describing the subsequent diffusion of Brahmanic myth and ritual amongst the *Kshatriyas* of ancient Hindu society, and their decline from pre-eminence as warriors and rulers to their lowly status as *Shudras* in the nineteenth century.

The Aryan Past and the Idea of a Golden Age

Phule's interpretation of this Aryan past differed strikingly from the meanings that were ascribed to it in most other contemporary accounts. The term 'Arya' had, of course, quite a wide range of associations, and these were to change during the nineteenth century. In general Marathi usage, it carried the idea of a respectable or noble descent.[23] It was also linked with the geographical concept of Aryavarta, the old cradle of European civilization in north-west India. Orientalists and philologists earlier in the nineteenth century had developed the argument that all speakers of Indo-European languages had shared a common origin in Aryavarta, and had gone their separate ways, to India, Persia, and Europe, after 2000 bc. In the *Rgveda* of the Hindus, and the *Avesta* of the Persians, this people had called itself Arya', or 'noble'. This suggestion of a common parentage was developed at length in the midnineteenth century in the work of Friedrich Max Müller, who used the idea to extol the virtues of ancient Indian society. Max Müller's ideas rapidly achieved circulation amongst western-educated Indian intellectuals.[24]

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, therefore, the term 'Arya' had come to connote a golden age of Indo-European civilization. By extension, it referred also to all that was 'best' in the Hindu tradition itself: it represented justice, virtue, and learning, the values of a highly developed civilization. The implication here was that, for the Hindus, this golden age had been followed by a 'fall', and a decline into the corruption of the present. The explanation for this decline was often

found in the dilution of 'pure' Aryan culture as the Aryans intermingled with the less civilized Dravidians and hill tribes of the Indian peninsula. This contrast of Aryan' with 'Dravidian' implicitly associated the former with higher-caste Hindus. Their virtues, in their pure and ancient form, represented all that was most valuable in the Hindu tradition. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, for example, emphasized the superiority of Asiatic Aryan culture. He regarded the conquest, and assimilation of non-Aryans, as a sign not of tyranny and injustice, but of the strength and vitality of the Aryan races.[25] Mahadev Govind Ranade presented the religious ideas of the Aryans as a basis for national political unity. He described how the original customs of the Aryans had been corrupted by the influence of the more primitive peoples of the south of India, who had been responsible for the introduction of customs that degraded women—*sati,* polygamy, and polyandry—and communal land tenure.[26] Dayananda Sarasvati and Aurobindo Ghose denied that there had been a struggle between the Aryans and the Dravidians that had given rise to the *varna* system. The *Shudras* of the present day were merely the descendants of ignorant Aryans who should be absorbed back into the Aryan fold. Dayananda Sarasvati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, constructed in his work *Satyartha Prakash* a complex theory of the ancient Aryan past. Aryan dynasties had then spread education and the Vedic religion to most of the western world.[27]

In this way, the term Aryan' came to define all that was most worth preserving in the Hindu tradition. At the same time it carried a clear implication, if not of the social groups that did represent Aryan values, at least of those that definitely did not—the *Shudras* of nineteenth-century India. Phule turned this interpretation of the Aryan past upside-down. The 'golden age' of India had been the pro- Aryan realm of *Kshatriyas,* under the benign rule of King Bali. The most important values of this society were those of the warrior and the peaceful landholder and cultivator. These values represented all that was best in nineteenth-century society. Their representatives were the *Shudras* and *ati-Shudras,* who united in their history the martial and the agricultural pursuits.

It is also noteworthy that of all the writers who were to draw upon the work of Orientalists and Sanskritists such as Max Müller to develop the concept of an ancient Aryan past, Phule was very much the earliest. Ghose, Tilak, and Ranade were all writing at the very end of the century. Dayananda's *Satyartha Prakash* came out two years after Phule's *Slavery,* in 1875. Phule was always very much to the forefront in recognizing the potential ideological importance of key symbols and concepts in nineteenth-century society, and in attempting to give them a meaning in line with his broader interpretation of history. In the case of the term 'Arya', he was less successful than he was, for example, with the term *'Kshatriya'*. The term retained its elite connotations for many members of the non-Brahman movement. Phule himself was later to produce a reinterpretation of the term to accommodate this.

Phule's focus of protest upon the idea of the indigenous ownership of the land has important parallels in other societies and movements. The example that springs most readily to mind is the idea of the Norman Yoke in English history. Christopher Hill has delineated the outlines of this theory as it was presented in the work of popular historians and radical pamphleteers from the early seventeenth century.[28] Before the Norman invasion of 1066, the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of England had lived as equal citizens, owning their own land and governing themselves through representative institutions. The Norman Conquest deprived them of their political freedom, and of their rights over the land, in establishing the tyranny of an alien king and landlords. This act of usurpation did not wipe out the popular memories of liberties previously enjoyed, and since 1066 the people had fought continuously to regain them from the descendants of the Normans.[29] This idea served in a variety of roles as a prominent element of popular political radicalism in England from the seventeenth century. As an explanation, powerful in its simplicity, of many of the political conflicts in England's history, it served both Parliamentarian pamphleteers and extreme radical groups in the English Civil War, and radicals and reformers of the eighteenth century such as Major Cartwright and Thomas Paine. It was used in the nineteenth century to attack the landed aristocracy and the concentration of political power within the narrow circles of the

wealthy and privileged, in the writings of William Cobbett and even of some Chartists. In very widely varying contexts, therefore, the theory could be used to suggest an irreconcilable opposition between the interests of the working population, the majority of the people of England, and those of the Crown and the landed classes.

Victor Turner has described a similar phenomenon in his analysis of movements of protest among low-status groups in African societies. Where there is a belief that in ancient times the indigenous inhabitants of the land have been conquered, protest among groups at the lower levels of society tends to focus on this supposed act of usurpation. Such groups see themselves as searching for a wholeness that has been lost, a wholeness represented by the land itself in its ancient unconquered state, and by the undivided human community that occupied it. This geographical and social wholeness is contrasted with the hierarchies that were introduced in the 'fall', represented by conquest from without. Turner describes how 'these autochthonous people have religious power, the "power of the weak" as against the jural-political power of the strong, and represent the undivided land itself as against the political system with its internal segmentation and hierarchies of authority. Here the model of an undifferentiated whole, whose units are total human beings, is posited against that of a differentiated system, whose units are status and roles, and where the social persona is segmentalized into positions in a structure.'[30]

The ability to explain inequalities by referring to an ancient act of expropriation of the land has clearly played a pivotal role in the process of group identity formation in a very wide variety of historical and cultural settings. Taken as history, such a theory enables large numbers of people to lay claim to their own understanding of the past. In societies where detailed information about the past has been the preserve of literary or religious specialists, this opens up new possibilities for the mobilization of large popular groups. Certainly, the conviction that the Maratha-*kunbis* were the original inhabitants of western India was to be a crucial element in the longer-term emergence

of a distinctive 'Maratha' identity, with its accompanying demands for the redress of economic, religious, and educational inequalities.

15

Dalit and Adivasi Assertion*

David Hardiman

The period of British colonial rule saw the forging of a series of wholly novel all-India collectivities, two of which in time came to be described as the 'Dalits' and the 'Adivasis'.[1] In the past, the groups that were later slotted into these categories occupied a series of positions in hierarchies that were relatively local in form. Those who now regard themselves to be Dalits (or 'the oppressed') were members of particular *jatis,* or sub-castes, who were considered to be at the lowest ends of the social scale. They themselves had their own internal hierarchies. In Gujarat, for example, a Dhed or Wankar regarded a Bhangi as of lower standing and ritually polluting.[2] The colonial state lumped all of these diverse jatis into a single monolithic all-India category. Groups that were seen to lie below a particular threshold of pollutability in caste terms were defined initially as the 'depressed classes' and, from 1909, the Untouchables.[3] The process was often arbitrary at the margins—in Gujarat, for example, the Vagharis, who were considered generally to be a low and polluting caste, were not classed as Untouchables, while the Dheds, Bhangis, Garudias, Khalpas, and Sindhvas were.[4] Similar boundaries were established between Adivasis—the so-called 'tribals'—and non-Adivasis, with various communities being lumped together under the category of 'early tribes',

in a manner that was again arbitrary at the margins.[5] As a whole, both the 'depressed classes' and 'early tribes' were placed in the category of 'Hindu', as opposed to Muslim, Christian, or Parsi. This implied that a Dalit or Adivasi was not a Muslim, Christian, etc., by origin or nature.

From 1909 onwards, the British treated these various imagined collectivities as political constituencies that were expected to represent their particular interests in a unified way, becoming a congeries of lobbies within the liberal polity. This gave rise to a form of politics in which certain politicians sought to build careers by claiming to speak for these collectivities. This process meshed in complex ways with another very different development, that of new forms of self-assertion arising from within these most subaltern of communities. From the late nineteenth century onwards, there were a series of local movements that took the form of self-cleansing. Often they were initiated and led by inspired leaders who claimed to be in touch with God. In many cases, they involved a process of spiritual renewal, in which old beliefs were discarded and new values and deities embraced. The characteristic response of the local elites was to repress such strivings in an often brutal manner. In some cases, however, the subaltern groups sought and gained support from powerful sympathizers. Most notable in this respect were Christian missionaries, who suddenly found them-selves—to their astonishment—being asked to provide guidance and leadership in movements of mass conversion to Christianity. From the second decade of the twentieth century onwards, leaders of the Indian nationalist struggle were increasingly called on to play such a role. Eager to build their constituencies as 'representatives' of the newly defined subaltern collectivities, these leaders seized the opportunity and claimed to speak for the 'depressed classes' or 'tribals'.

Of all the nationalist leaders, the one who became the foremost embodiment of such popular hopes and desires was Gandhi. Through his life and personal struggles, Gandhi forged a persona that resonated among the Indian masses in a manner that was unprecedented. Often, he himself was taken by surprise by the forms that this popular adulation took. He sought to distance himself, at times through denials

of popular beliefs which circulated about his supposed miraculous powers;[6] at times through an irritated scolding of the tumultuous crowds which pressed about him eager for his darshan. Yet, still the people were drawn to him, bearing out V.N. Volosinov's maxim—'if a thought is powerful, convincing, significant, then obviously it has succeeded in contacting *essential* aspects in the life of the social group in question, succeeding in making a connection between itself and the basic position of that group in the *class struggle,* despite the fact that the creator of that thought might himself be wholly unaware of having done so.'[7] Gandhi sought to channel the hopes and dreams that he had aroused in this way into an orderly programme of constructive work that would integrate these communities within the nationalist movement. In doing so, he adopted the language of the all-India collectivity, claiming in particular to be the spokesman for 'Untouchables' throughout India. The history which ensued, and which is the subject of this chapter, involved a dialogue between Gandhi and the Dalits and Adivasis that in part voiced common desires, but which also became grounded at times on the emancipatory limitations of Gandhi's own programme, the elitism of many of his followers, and opposition to his message from within these very communities.

Dalits

Gandhi had from the earliest years in South Africa strongly opposed the practice of treating certain communities as being ritually polluting. In this, he was in line with several Indian social reformers and religious leaders of the late nineteenth century, such as Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, and B.G. Tilak. He saw the practice as a corruption of Hinduism. It also, he believed, revealed the hypocrisy of demands by high-caste Hindus for Indian self-determination, for they were not themselves prepared to offer the same to these lowest of subaltern communities.[8] By taking such a stand, Gandhi involved himself in a long and often acrimonious debate with orthodox Hindus on the one hand and, from the early 1930s onwards, with self-assertive leaders of the Dalits themselves on the other.

Although the institution of untouchability was inseparable from the caste system, Gandhi did not during his early years as a nationalist leader in India push his condemnation of the latter towards a critique of caste in general. Later, he was to be severely criticized for this by many Dalit activists. During the South African years, however, Gandhi had appeared to have little time for the caste system. He had been expelled from his own Baniya sub-caste for travelling overseas— considered a 'polluting' act at that time—and had never sought to gain readmission to the caste. In 1909, he condemned the caste system and 'caste tyranny'.[9] On his return to India he adopted a much softer line on the question. He denied that the caste system had harmed India, arguing that it was no more than a form of labour division, similar to occupational divisions all over the world.[10] It was in fact superior to class divisions, which were based on wealth primarily.[11] He also believed that reform could be brought about through caste organizations.[12] He was influenced in this by his admiration at that time for caste associations such as the Patidar Yuvak Mandal, in which young Arya Samajist social reformers had sought to reform the Patidar caste and promote self-help educational activities.[13] He believed that marriage should be within caste.[14] In 1918 he clarified that by this he meant *varna,* rather than narrow jati.[15] In 1925 he was talking of the need for jatis to merge into varnas based on occupation.[16] In 1931 he condemned the jati system, but praised a fourfold varna system consisting of (1) imparters of knowledge, (2) defenders of the defenceless, (3) farmers or traders, (4) labourers. He believed now that there should be intermarriage.[17] He also endorsed interdining, including with Dalits.[18] In the mid-1930s, Gandhi moved towards a more radical critique of caste. This was largely in response to Ambedkar, as we shall see below. In 1935 he thus argued that *varnashram* no longer existed in practice and that: 'The present caste system is the very antithesis of varnashram. The sooner public opinion abolishes it the better.'[19] In 1936 he stated that the dowry system was an evil propped up by caste, and that if removing it meant breaking the

bonds of the caste system, then he would endorse such a move.[20] By 1946 he was urging caste Hindu girls to marry Dalits.[21]

In all of this, Gandhi never compromised over the issue of untouchability, which he always regarded as an out-and-out perversion. He fought hard against the practice after his return to India in 1915. In the ashram that he established in Ahmedabad in 1915 he banned any observation of untouchability. However, he refused to force any inmate to eat with a Dalit against their will, arguing that he had no reason to believe that eating in company promoted brotherhood in any way whatsoever.[22] In September 1915 Gandhi admitted a member of the Dhed (a Dalit) community to the ashram, causing great hostility within and outside the institution. Kasturba Gandhi was particularly upset.[23] During the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1921-2 he called on Hindus to 'remove the sin of untouchability', otherwise there would be no swaraj, even in a hundred years.[24]

After his release from jail in 1924, with the political struggle in the doldrums, Gandhi took up the issue of untouchability as a central concern. He debated the matter with orthodox Sanatanist Hindus. They provided textual evidence that justified the practice; he argued that what was at stake was morality, and he refused to accept the moral validity of such texts, arguing that they were no longer appropriate for the present times. Such an argument merely riled the orthodox; they accused Gandhi of being corrupted by Christian propaganda. Gandhi countered by arguing that Hinduism was not a text-based religion, but one that was rooted in moral precepts, and texts that conflicted with morality could be discounted. Neither side was prepared to yield any ground on the matter.[25]

During 1924-5 there was a protest by an Untouchable community of Kerala, the Iravas, against a ban on their using a street in front of a temple at Vaikam that was controlled by Nambudiri Brahmans. This was described as a 'satyagraha', and it in fact popularized the use of the term in Kerala, along with 'khadi' and 'ahimsa'.[26] Gandhi took up the issue, travelling to Kerala to negotiate with the Brahmans who

controlled the temple. During the debate, one of them stated that the Iravas had been born as Untouchables because of their karma, for example because of their misdeeds in past lives, and that it was therefore God's will that they be excluded from the precincts of the temple. Gandhi took a soft line on this, accepting that the Iravas were indeed victims of karma, but he added that humans had no right to add to the punishment awarded by God. He thus refrained from condemning the whole baggage of beliefs that justified such discrimination.[27]

In this, Gandhi was adopting a position of seeking to reform Hindu practice from within, rather than attack it from the outside. His aim was to bring about a gradual delegitimization of the practices of such Brahman priests. In Vaikam, the latter had showed themselves up when their representative had pleaded before him pathetically: 'Mahatmaji, we beseech you to prevent Avarnas [Untouchables] from depriving us of our old privileges.'[28] The heart of the matter thus stood revealed—theology provided no more than a cover for social privilege.

Gandhi was reluctant to involve the state in this process of soul searching from within, as he felt that this would not bring about any profound change of heart among the orthodox. Persuasion was the best method. Educated leaders of the Dalits saw this approach as too gradualist. They saw that the Vaikam Satyagraha had achieved only limited results—the road past the temple was shifted, so although Iravas could now use it, they did so at a distance from the holy place. They were certainly not allowed entry into the temple. B.R. Ambed- kar, who was emerging in the 1920s as a powerful young leader of the Dalits of Maharashtra, praised Gandhi for his work for Untouchables—far surpassing that of any other major Indian nationalist leader—but felt that he needed to take a far more radical stance. He noted that the Brahmans at Vaikam had used the Hindu scriptures to justify their position, and regretted that Gandhi had not subjected these pernicious texts to a rigorous criticism.[29]

Ambedkar then extended the Gandhian approach into a new area, that of highlighting the civil rather than religious discrimination

suffered by Untouchables. He launched a satyagraha at Mahad in the Konkan in 1927 in which Dalits asserted their right to use a public tank in the Brahman quarter of the town. The protesters involved the name of Gandhi, displaying his portrait. Around ten thousand Dalits came from all over Maharashtra to participate, and Ambedkar led a procession to the tank and drank water from it. The Brahmans ceremoniously re-purified the tank after they had gone, and then secured a court injunction that temporarily banned Ambedkar and three of his colleagues from using the tank. Another meeting was held at Mahad at which Ambedkar staged a public burning of the *Manusmrti* —the text *par excellence* of Brahmanical privilege. He did not however defy the injunction by drinking from the tank. He preferred to fight the matter out in court, a long-drawn-out process that went eventually in his favour after three years.[30]

In 1929 Ambedkar took the fight to the heart of Brahmanical power in Maharashtra, launching a satyagraha in Pune city to gain entry to the Parvati temple. Gandhi did not approve of this, believing it to be too confrontational a move. The right-wing Congressmen M.M. Malaviya and Jamnalal Bajaj were sent to investigate; they reported that the affair was causing great resentment in Maharashtra, and they condemned it. Without Congress support, the satyagraha failed, leaving Ambedkar and his followers bitter. The same happened with a further satyagraha which began in 1930 in the pilgrimage town of Nasik. The Dalits of Maharashtra began to doubt Gandhi's commitment to their cause as well as the efficacy of satyagraha.[31]

This distrust was compounded by the way in which Gandhi related to Ambedkar during these years. On their first meeting in Bombay in August 1931, Gandhi treated Ambedkar in a brusque manner, believing that he was a Brahman who was claiming to speak for Untouchables in a questionable manner.[32] They were in contact with each other again across the negotiating table at the Second Round Table Conference in London in late 1931. Although Gandhi now knew that he was an Untouchable, he continued to question his status as a spokesman for the community. When Ambedkar argued that Untouchables should be

granted separate seats in the proposed constitutional reforms—something Muslims had already been granted—Gandhi asserted: 'I say that it is not a proper claim which is registered by Dr Ambedkar when he seeks to speak for the whole of the Untouchables of India . . . I myself in my own person claim to represent the vast mass of the Untouchables.'[33] When in 1932 the British announced that they accepted Ambedkar's demand, and that there would be separate electorates for Untouchables, Gandhi launched a fast to death in opposition. He had a strong case—distinct electorates for Muslims had undoubtedly been divisive, creating as they did a class of politicians whose basis was that of a separatist politics. Ambedkar's own position also had a strong justification: the interests of Dalits, who were in a minority everywhere, would be submerged in the politics of the majority. These substantial points of difference were however overlain by much personal rancour. Gandhi appears to have resented Ambedkar as an upstart. In an aside to Vallabhbhai Patel that was overheard by his secretary, Mahadev Desai, he voiced right-wing Hindu prejudices in a most shabby manner, stating that if Untouchables had separate electorates they would make common cause with 'Muslim hooligans and kill caste Hindus'.[34] In the end, it was Ambedkar who bowed to the pressure, agreeing to abandon separate electorates in favour of reserved seats for Untouchables within a general electorate. This system has continued in India to this day.

Gandhi and Ambedkar tried to work together in the All-India Untouchability League, formed immediately after the conclusion of the fast. With Gandhi then propagating a new term for Untouchables—that of Harijans or 'People of God'—the body was soon renamed the Harijan Sevak Sangh.[35] Gandhi launched a major campaign in 1933-4 against the practice of untouchability, touring India in person to put pressure on caste Hindus to open up access for Untouchables to public wells, tanks, roads, schools, temples, and cremation grounds. In response to Ambedkar, Gandhi had extended his battle for the Untouchables into the civil sphere. Previously, his challenge had been restricted to temple entry. However, Ambedkar soon left the

organization, for the differences between the two were profound. Gandhi insisted that the organization was to be run primarily by caste Hindus as a means for their self-purification, whereas Ambedkar demanded that the leadership be by the Dalits themselves. He found Gandhi's approach to be tainted with an insufferable paternalism, of a sort that he himself had experienced in a humiliating way throughout his life in his dealings with high-caste people. Ambedkar condemned the caste system in its entirety, whereas Gandhi continued for the moment to cling to a belief that it was possible to return to an idealized four-caste system of social organization. Ambedkar rejected Gandhi's belief that there could be a meaningful dialogue with Brahmans and the high castes over the matter of untouchability, and he saw the idea of them undergoing a voluntary 'change of heart' as a chimera. In addition, Ambedkar could see that Gandhi was out on a limb, being opposed in his Harijan work by large numbers of caste Hindus, many of whom were Congress members, as well as by members of the socialist and communist left, who dismissed such work as a culturalist and superstructural distraction from the struggle against imperialism and capitalism.[36]

Once this break from Gandhi had been made, Ambedkar went in yet more radical directions. He stopped fighting for temple entry, stating that Untouchables should no longer aspire for a place in the Hindu fold. However, he implicitly accepted the emphasis that Gandhi had all along placed on religion by mapping out a radical new religious agenda for Dalits.[37] In 1935 he advised them to convert to other religions, such as Islam, Christianity, and Sikhism, even though he had misgivings about Islam and Christianity, as they were 'foreign' religions. He also saw that in practice non-Dalit Sikhs discriminated against their Dalit co-religionists. It was at this time that he began his move towards Buddhism.[38]

Gandhi, meanwhile, was extending his own Harijan movement all over India, in what was known as the 'Harijan Yatra', with considerable success in some regions. For example, after he had toured Mysore State in January 1934 the authorities responded by agreeing to fund the

improvement of facilities for Untouchables. Branches of the Harijan Sevak Sangh were established all over the state, and its workers were encouraged to open schools for Harijans. In 1936, Untouchables were invited for the first time by the maharaja to participate in the annual Dashera Darbar. The state also supported temple entry in principle, though it proved hard to implement in practice.[39]

The campaign not only put caste Hindus throughout India on the defensive, but enraged many Brahmans. Notable among the latter were some Hindu nationalists of Pune. On 25 June 1934 they even attempted to assassinate Gandhi by throwing a bomb at a car in which he was believed to be travelling. They had in fact mistakenly attacked the car of the chief officer of the municipal corporation, who was severely injured by the blast along with nine other bystanders. Gandhi, in the following car, escaped unharmed. The attackers escaped and no arrests were made.

Despite all these efforts, the majority of Dalits throughout India remained unaware of these campaigns, whether by Gandhi or Ambedkar. Ambedkarite radicalism had the greatest impact amongst the Mahar community of Maharashtra, and with educated Dalits and industrial workers in some of the larger cities. Gandhi and his Harijan Sevak Sangh had a greater sway in the city of Ahmedabad, where members of the Vankar community were his strong supporters, and among the Valmikis of Delhi. In rural areas, in general, Gandhian anti-untouchability work had the higher profile. Often, the only voices to be heard speaking up for Dalit rights were those of Congress activists aligned to the Harijan Sevak Sangh. Few Dalits, however, took these injunctions very seriously, for they knew too well from bitter experience the likely reactions of the village elites if they did indeed try to assert their rights.[40]

By the 1940s, seeing the slow progress of his Harijan work, Gandhi became more open to the idea of a direct state-led assault on the practice of untouchability. In this, he became more in tune with Ambedkar. He thus supported the banning of the practice of untouchability by law, and gave his full support to a policy of

reservation of seats for Dalits in elections (in 1932 he had conceded this point to Ambedkar with great reluctance, as the lesser of two ills). He also insisted that Nehru appoint Ambedkar as Law Minister in the new government, even though he was not a member of the Congress. Many Congress members resented this move, but it followed on from Gandhi's belief that one should always reach out to and try to incorporate an opponent. Ambedkar was to become the leading figure in the drafting of a new constitution for India.[41] Gandhi had at last accepted that Dalits had to exercise power themselves if they were to better their position in any meaningful way. When the Indian Constituent Assembly formally abolished untouchability on 29 November 1948, the house resounded with cries of 'Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!'[42] The law was seen to be a particularly moving tribute to the memory of Gandhi, who had been assassinated ten months earlier.

D.R. Nagaraj has argued that although Gandhi and Ambedkar were in sharp conflict in the 1930s and their differences of that time continue to provide a reference point for the modern Dalit movement, they had in many respects moved towards each other implicitly, if not explicitly, by the end of that decade. He states that 'having jumped into action they cured each other's excesses; they emerged as transformed persons at the end of a very intense encounter.'[43] He goes on to argue that there was in fact always a lot of common ground between them. For example, they both took up the issue of untouchability as a primarily political one, in contrast to those—such as the bhakti *sants*—who had previously fought the battle largely in the religious sphere. Also, both emphasized the centrality of this issue for Indian society as a whole.[44] Nagaraj regrets the hardening of positions on both sides of the divide today, arguing that the need now is for a synthesis of the two approaches. He accepts that this cannot be done at a strictly logical level, as there are profound theoretical differences between the two approaches, but feels that it can be done if we seek for a deeper underlying truth.[45]

Is this hope an over-optimistic one? In contemporary India, the reality for most Dalits is a continuing routine discrimination in their daily life, with acts of assertion being met by beatings, rape, and

murder. Although parliamentary and legislative assembly seats are reserved for Dalits, and they are given scholarships and reserved places in schools and colleges, only a small minority benefit from this, and even those who manage against the odds to obtain high qualifications are often denied employment. The large majority of Dalits continue to live in great poverty. The local police often fail to prevent attacks on Dalits, while covering up for the violence of the dominant classes.[46] Politicians seek to win the Dalit vote by claiming to abhor the practice of untouchability, but move to crush any acts that challenge Hinduism itself. In 2001, for example, some Dalits planned to stage a mass conversion to Buddhism in Delhi. Hindutva activists promptly issued a threat that Dalits who attended would be attacked. Others who were not associated with the Hindu right added their voice to the anti-Dalit clamour, arguing that conversion would provoke communal tension. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government used its power of office to prevent many Dalits from entering Delhi, so that the event turned out to be a damp squib.[47]

In such a climate, it is understandable that few Dalit activists be-lieve that the system will be reformed by caste Hindus from within. They have good reason to question the efficacy of dialogue and compromise. Dalits have however deployed satyagraha to good effect on many occasions, and there is no reason to believe that it is any less efficacious as a means for struggle today. Not only does it continue to provide a powerful means for applying pressure, but it also serves to remind caste Hindus that their continuing maltreatment of Gandhi's 'children of God' represents an enduring insult to his name. In this respect the legacy of both Gandhi and Ambedkar continues to be of crucial importance for the Dalits of modern India.

Adivasis

The Adivasis, or so-called 'tribals', were a disparate group of *jatis* that had been defined by the British as 'early tribes'. It was argued that these jatis could be characterized, among other things, by their clan based systems of kinship and their 'primitive' animistic religiosity. In some

cases they were defined in terms of their habitat, as 'jungle tribes'. In the twentieth century they were given the bureaucratic label 'Scheduled Tribes'. In reaction to all of this, many of them claimed, assertively, to be Adivasis, or 'original inhabitants'. In India the largest concentrations of the people so described were found in the north-east. Elsewhere, many were found in the central-eastern region, in what is now the state of Jharkhand and areas adjoining it in Bengal, Orissa, and Bastar, and in a belt of western India running over the four modern Indian states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra.[48]

Although there were many jatis that had been classed by the British as 'early' or 'jungle tribes' in Gandhi's own Gujarat, he does not appear to have been conscious of them in any important respect before 1921. He had been brought up in Saurashtra, and had then based himself in Ahmedabad city, neither of which had any significant population of these jatis, and his work in South Africa had not brought him into contact with them, unlike Dalits, some of whom had migrated there. In this, there was a marked contrast to his concern about the discriminations faced by the Untouchables and the need to incorporate them within the movement—something which had for many years been a central question both for him and other nationalists. Gandhi's affection was drawn to the matter of the 'tribals' of Gujarat for the first time during the Non-Cooperation movement. There were two groups concerned—the Bhils and the so-called 'Kaliparaj'.

The Bhils were the largest of the so-called 'tribal' communities of the western India region. In the past they had been organized in warlike clans that prevented outside rulers from extending their control over the mountains. The British had subjugated them—with considerable difficulty—during the first half of the nineteenth century. Even afterwards, there were several Bhil revolts. The 'Kaliparaj' were found only in South Gujarat. The term, which meant 'the black people', was a derogatory one used by non-Adivasis to describe members of a variety of local Adivasi jatis, such as the Chodhris, Dhodiyas, and Gamits. These jatis were considered to be less warlike than the Bhils. These communities had lived in the past from shifting cultivation, hunting,

and gathering, and they were encouraged by the British to practice a more settled and intensive agriculture. In many cases, they were excluded from large tracts of forest that they had previously controlled, so that state foresters could exploit the timber wealth of the woodlands.[49] Landlords, usurers, and liquor dealers who were protected by the colonial and princely states ruthlessly exploited those who became settled.[50] This frequently created a crisis of confidence among these people in their own cultures, leading them to look for alternative and more efficacious cultural models. Most notable in this respect was a powerful movement among the Bhils of the Gujarat–Rajasthan border region in 1913 that was led by a charismatic leader called Govind, who was believed to have miraculous powers. The British eventually suppressed this movement by force as it was seen to challenge the hegemony of the local princely rulers.

Nationalists of Gujarat began to reach out to the Adivasis from 1918. During the great influenza epidemic of that year some young activists of the Patidar Yuvak Mandal distributed medicine to the 'Kaliparaj' in an attempt to gain their sympathy.[51] In the Panchmahals, where the Adivasis were all Bhils, some local nationalist workers took up their grievances after the monsoon had failed in the same year. Even though many of the Bhils were starving, government officials were confiscating their meagre possessions—even stripping the tiles from their roofs Non-Cooperation movement of 1to realize land-tax demands. In 1919 Gandhi's prominent lieutenant, Indulal Yagnik, and a leading member of Gokhale's Servants of India Society, Amritlal Thakkar, raised funds from capitalists in Bombay to buy food that was then distributed among the Bhils.[52]

This initial work in the Panchmahals was consolidated during the period of the Non-Cooperation movement of 1920–2, when meetings were organized by nationalists to encourage the Bhils to give up drinking liquor. Some took a vow to abjure spirits while bowing to a portrait of Gandhi.[53] Food was again in short supply among the Bhils in 1921, and Yagnik once more raised funds to purchase food for them. In this, he encountered considerable opposition from other leading

nationalists of Gujarat, such as Vallabhbhai Patel and G.V. Mavalankar, who did not feel that such work was a priority at that time. Gandhi, however, supported, this work.[54] Yagnik also established a National Bhil Hostel that was modelled on similar hostels run by the government and Christian missionaries.[55] Amritlal Thakkar joined him in this work in early 1922 and put the project on a much firmer footing. Another hostel was opened, called 'the Bhil Ashram'.[56] Soon after, Thakkar established the Bhil Seva Mandal, which was in overall control of work amongst the Bhils. This organization laid the foundations for his life's work amongst the Adivasis of India.[57]

It was at this juncture that Gandhi himself took up the problem of assimilating the Adivasis of the region into the movement. The immediate context was provided by the proposal to launch civil disobedience against the British in one *taluka,* that of Bardoli in South Gujarat. Although Gandhi had been informed that the people of this area were wholly behind the struggle, he soon discovered that about half the population consisted of 'Kaliparaj' who had not been mobilized at all. He demanded that this be rectified. The Congress activists then started going to the Adivasi villages, but with minimal success initially. Meanwhile, a powerful protest movement had developed among the Bhils in the border region between Gujarat and Rajasthan. They were led by a Baniya of Mewar State called Motilal Tejawat, who had once worked for a Rajput lord, but who had resigned in disgust at the way such people treated the Bhils. Tejawat saw the protest as being a part of the wider movement for independence led by Gandhi, then in a most active phase. In speeches he stated that once 'Gandhi raj' was established they would only have to pay one anna in the rupee to their rulers. Some of his followers took to wearing white caps. He clearly believed that in trying to wean the Bhils away from violence he was following the programme of the Gandhian movement closely. As yet, however, Gandhi knew nothing of him or his movement.[58]

In early 1922 Tejawat and several thousand Bhils armed with bows and arrows went on a progress around the villages of the region. There were some minor clashes, with aggressive policemen and officials being

beaten. There is no record of anyone being killed by the Bhils—by their standards they were protesting in a remarkably non-violent manner. When however Gandhi heard of this, he wrote an article in *Young India* disowning the Bhils and their leader; 'none has authority to use my name save under my own writing . . . nobody has any authority from me to use any arms, even sticks, against any person.' He warned them that if continued in such an aggressive manner, 'they will find everything and everybody arrayed against them and they will find themselves heavy losers in the end.'[59] Gandhi was not however satisfied that he had heard all he needed to know about this movement, and he sent a leading nationalist worker, Manilal Kothari, to investigate. Motilal and the Bhils were then in Sirohi state, and Kothari managed to meet up with them there and take a promise from Tejawat that he would avoid violence. Kothari was impressed by the power of the movement and sent back favourable reports to Gandhi.

Motilal had been both upset and disheartened when he had learnt of Gandhi's disavowal of his activities in the *Young India* article of 2 February, for he saw himself as a faithful disciple. As he stated, however, in a letter to Gandhi of 11 February, he knew he could not prevent his own followers from carrying arms—with all the possible dangers that that entailed. He argued that despite this Gandhi should view them favourably as an intrinsically peaceful and religious-minded people who were suffering oppression by autocratic and corrupt rulers.[60] Gandhi gave a rather lukewarm response on 26 February, in which he accepted that Tejawat was doing some excellent work among the Bhils, but pointed out that he had failed to grasp his philosophy in certain important respects.[61] Although his tone was more sympathetic, he was still not very welcoming towards his self-avowed disciple. It was at this juncture that the British moved against the protesters, sending the Mewar Bhil Corps to crush the movement. They surprised a meeting of Motilal and his followers on the morning of 7 March, opening fire on the peaceful crowd from a nearby hill. The commander of the Bhil Corps, Major Sutton, claimed that twenty-two Bhils were killed in what

he described as a skirmish.[62] Against this, an oral tradition of the Bhils claims that between 1000 and 1500 were killed.[63]

It is almost certainly the case that Sutton's figure of twenty-two was an understatement, and probably a large one at that. A local missionary who treated the wounded stated that 'there were a hundred casualties; dead and wounded were lying all around, some with fearful wounds. Our little hospital was filled and we were bringing in stretcher cases until 10 p.m.'[64] For Sutton, twenty-two was a politic figure—not representing a denial that a serious incident had occurred, but not an indicator, either, that the carnage had been out of all proportion to the seriousness of the situation. Sutton claimed that the Bhils had started firing and that he had ordered a counter-firing in self-defence. As a British official, G.D. Ogilvie, stated a few days later, little more could be expected in a case involving a 'people little removed from savagery . . . childishly ignorant and inflammable . . .'[65]

The nationalist press, when it took any notice at all,[66] satisfied itself by merely regurgitating the government communique.[67] There was no suggestion that the shooting was in any way a cause for outrage. Even the most obvious questions were not posed; for example, if the Bhils had, as alleged, made a violent attack on Sutton and his men, why had the latter not suffered a single injury? No attempts were made by the Gujarat Congress to investigate the matter any further, even though it had the potential to be 'Gujarat's Amritsar'. Bhil lives, it seems, were of minor matter.[68] Motilal himself had managed to escape after the firing started, and the movement continued strongly for two more months. There were further shootings and atrocities, though not of the magnitude of that of 7 March. British officials captured Bhil headmen and forced them to break *Eki* (unity) oath in public.[69] By May 1922 the movement had all but collapsed, leaving Motilal a fugitive.

Gandhi and his followers' response to this Bhil movement left a lot to be desired. The situation was not much better in the Panchmahals, where the single most important leader of the Bhils of that area, Govind, became an implacable opponent of the Gandhians during the

Non-Cooperation movement. Govind, who had led the Bhil movement of 1913, had been jailed until 1919, when he was released on condition that he take no part in any 'political' activities. In 1921, the Gandhians had persuaded him to attend their Bhil conference in Dahod, which he had agreed to do, as he did not see it as being 'political'. The British thought otherwise and arrested him before he could reach Dahod. He realized that he had been tricked, and as he was led away he showered abuse on the nationalists.[70] Thereafter, the Gandhians had great difficulty in winning any mass support from the Bhils of the region, though the Bhil Seva Mandal itself continued to operate with impressive efficiency.

In South Gujarat, the Gandhians managed eventually to win much wider support among the Adivasis. In a powerful movement for self-assertion that was launched in 1922, Gandhi was projected by the Adivasis as a divine being who was somehow working to ameliorate their condition. Vows were taken in his name, and miracles expected from him.[71] Gandhians sought to channel these hopes in different directions by organizing meetings for the Adivasis from 1923 onwards, at which they were encouraged to abjure liquor and meat, to spin khadi, and live a clean, simple, and diligent life. This was characterized in high Hindu terms as *atmashuddhi*, or self-purification. Through such a cleansing the Adivasis would, it was believed, become worthy citizens of the Indian nation. They also campaigned to replace the demeaning term 'Kaliparaj' with that of 'Raniparaj', or 'people of the forest'. The leading figure in this initiative was Dr Sumant Mehta, who recalled how humiliated he had been when he was called a 'blackey' while undergoing medical training in England.[72] At the same time, the Gandhians discouraged Adivasis from continuing the labour boycott that they had been waging against local landlords. They were advised to go back to work.[73] in 1924, an ashram was established in the heart of the Adivasi area at Vedchhi to carry on Gandhian work.

Many high-caste supporters of the Gandhian Congress opposed this activity. In early 1924, for example, the Gandhian Narhari Parikh started night school for Dubla labourers in an area dominated by Anavil

and Patidar peasants. The Dublas were a 'Kaliparaj' community who were mostly bonded agricultural labourers working for the two dominant castes. During the Non-Cooperation movement the Patidars had given strong support to the Gandhian Congress. However, they felt very threatened by the night school, believing that their hegemony over the Dublas would be jeopardized if they became literate. They informed the Dublas that if they wanted to continue in employment they should stop attending the school. Many Patidars returned their spinning wheels to the local ashram at Sarbhan in protest. When the Dublas defied them, they went to the school and drove them out. Parikh launched a fast in protest, sending a message to Gandhi that he was doing this to bring about a change of heart, not because he bore any grudge against the Patidars. Gandhi gave his blessings, and Vallabhbhai Patel travelled down from Ahmedabad to try to persuade the Patidars to withdraw their opposition to the school. The initial response of the Patidars was aggressive—they stated that they did not care if Parikh died. Eventually, Patel persuaded them to accept the school, and Parikh called off his fast. Despite this, individual Patidars made it clear to the Dublas that if they attended the class they would remain unemployed. Intimidated, the Dublas stopped going to the class, and it had to be closed down.[74]

In following Gandhi's injunction to carry out social and political work among the poor and marginalized, people such as Amritlal Thakkar and Narhari Parikh demonstrated considerable moral courage. They often had to fight the local elites who profited by exploiting the Adivasis and who considered them troublemakers. There were however limits to their radicalism. They tended to have a superior attitude towards the Adivasis, seeing them as 'primitives' who required to be 'civilized'. For example, Amritlal Thakkar considered that the Bhils were 'hardly conscious of being human'. He saw his task as being that of winning the community 'back to the country and to humanity'.[75] Within the ashrams, the Gandhians never considered putting Adivasis into positions of responsibility, even though there were educated Adivasis who were capable of carrying out such work on equal terms with the caste Hindus. The Gandhians expended a lot of energy

attacking aspects of Adivasi culture that were seen to violate upper-caste notions of decency, such as dances in which men and women held each other around the waist. More pressing concerns were ignored, such as the exploitation of the Adivasis by usurers, landlords, and rich peasants.[76]

The situation was worse elsewhere, for many high-caste members of the Gandhian Congress became actively hostile when certain Adivasis claimed to be followers of Gandhi. This was apparent in the revolt of the Gond Adivasis of the Rampa and Gudem hill tracts of the AndhraOrissa border region led by Alluri Sita Rama Raju in 1922–4. There were certain parallels between Sita Rama Raju and Motilal Tejawat, though there were also important differences. Sita Rama Raju was a high-caste Telugu who became a sanyasi and who was believed by the Gonds to have supernatural powers. He appears to have come into contact with the Gandhian movement while on a pilgrimage to Nasik in 1921. He began to wear khadi, and on his return preached temperance and the need to resolve disputes locally rather than through the British courts. He launched a rebellion in September 1922 that was sustained for nearly two years. In contrast to Tejawat, Sita Rama Raju encouraged his followers to arm themselves with guns and fight the British using guerrilla tactics. He himself dyed his khadi shirt red, and wore a military-style leather belt with a captured police pistol tucked into it. He tried to gain support for his revolt from Congress nationalists in the plains, but they not only refused to support him, but actively opposed his movement on the grounds that it violated Gandhi's principles of non-violence. A more important reason for their hostility was perhaps that they tended to be of the same class as the traders, usurers, contractors, immigrant cultivators, and lawyers whom the Gonds were resisting as their exploiters. Sita Rama Raju was eventually captured and summarily executed by the police in May 1924, bringing the revolt to an end.[77]

Another powerful Adivasi movement that claimed to be inspired by Gandhi was that of the Oraons of the Jharkhand region. This movement had begun during the First World War, when large numbers of Oraons

had resolved to reform their lives. They became known as Tana Bhagats. Besides giving up liquor, meat-eating, and their fear of ghosts and evil spirits, they also stopped paying their rents to high caste landlords. Seeing this as a threat to law and order, the British authorities tried to suppress this non-violent movement, with little success.[78] During the Non-Cooperation movement, the Tana Bhagats became strong supporters of Gandhi and the Congress. About 20,000 of them refused to pay their taxes to the state, believing that 'Gandhi raj' had arrived. Many had their land confiscated as a result. Despite this they remained firm, courting jail and travelling long distances to attend Congress meetings. They had faith that once swaraj was won they would regain all the land that they had lost over the course of the past century.[79] On a tour of Bihar in 1925, Gandhi met some Tana Bhagats who wore khadi. He was very impressed when they demonstrated their skills in spinning in his presence.[80]

Despite the obvious success of his movement among many Adivasis, Gandhi did not devote any great intellectual or political energy to them and their problems. He knew that work was being done in this respect by his followers in various parts of India, such as Amritlal Thakkar in the Panchmahals and Jugatram Dave in South Gujarat, and he was content to let them carry on. He did, however, try to discourage them from proselytizing their own values in a heavy-handed manner. As he stated in 1928: As regards taking our message to the aborigines, I do not think I should go and give my message out of my own wisdom. Do it in all humility . . . What have I to take to the aborigines and the Assamese hillmen except to go in my nakedness to them? Rather than ask them to join my prayer, I would join their prayer.'[81]

During the Civil Disobedience movement of 1930–1, many Adi-vasis anticipated by disobeying the forest laws—an action which became classed as 'forest satyagraha'. Gandhi himself had refused to sanction such action, on the grounds that he was ignorant of forest regulations.[82] Once he had been jailed, local Congress leaders went ahead and launched the satyagrahas. In central India, Gond and Korku Adivasis were led by khadi-clad Congress nationalists in invasions of

government forests, where they cut and removed grass in violation of the law. When the police tried to intervene, there were in some cases violent clashes. By August 1930, the nationalists were no longer in control of the protest in many areas, and the government was becoming seriously alarmed. Police reinforcements were sent, and the Adivasi were repressed in a heavy-handed manner. By October the protests had died down in most areas though not all.[83] At the same time, there were forest satyagrahas in the Sahyadri Mountains in Maharashtra, which were generally non-violent. There was also an upsurge in movements of Adivasi assertion that were linked with Gandhi's name, such as the Haribaba movement in Jharkhand of 1931–2.[84]

Despite this widespread Adivasi support for the Congress, Gandhi himself continued to treat Adivasi issues as marginal to the movement as a whole. For example, he insisted that Amritlal Thakkar expend his chief energies on Harijan work, as Secretary of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, rather than on the Bhils and other Adivasis, which was where Thakkar's heart really lay. He also showed little interest in Verrier Elwin's work among the Gonds. Elwin had come to India as a Christian missionary in 1927 and become close to Gandhi during the period of the Civil Disobedience movement. He came to see Gandhi as a surrogate father, a role Gandhi accepted.[85] Elwin abandoned his missionary work, and in 1932—inspired by the example of Amritlal Thakkar and the Bhil Seva Mandal—decided to establish a Gandhian-style ashram among the Gonds of Mandla District in the Central Provinces, which he named the Gond Seva Mandal.[86]

In 1932 and 1933 Gandhi sent at least fourteen letters to Elwin. These letters were however of a very personal nature—Gandhi showed almost no interest in the. Gonds. When Elwin fell ill, he even advised him to give up his work and return to England.[87] Elwin did not follow this suggestion and continued in Mandla. The work was nevertheless raising difficult questions for him. Initially—as a lapsed missionary—Elwin had appreciated the Gandhian principle that it was wrong to seek to convert people to a faith different to the one in which they had been raised.[88]

He came to see, however, that the Gandhians who were working among the Adivasis were involved in conversion of a more subtle sort, namely that of inculcating their own cultural values. Most of these were, Elwin felt, irrelevant to the Adivasis. Khadi-spinning—a major feature of Gandhian constructive work amongst Adivasis—for example, was of no use to the Gonds, for cotton was not grown in their tract. Elwin considered the Gandhian condemnation of liquor to be out of touch with Gond beliefs, for they loved their liquor, made from the mahua flower, and in fact they saw this as central to their identity as a community. Mahua grew freely in the area, and the liquor was, Elwin felt, a far more genuinely swadeshi product for Adivasis than khadi. He also found that the Gonds did not respect him for the strict celibacy that he observed in accordance with Gandhi's advice. They saw it, rather, as a perversion. He was attracted by the way that the Gonds expressed their sexuality in an open and uninhibited way, and began to feel that they acted with greater honesty than the uptight and narrow-minded Gandhians who made a great show of repressing their desires in an often hypocritical manner. He soon abandoned his vow and began to have sexual relationships with Gond women.[89] Towards the end of 1933 he came out with a public critique of the nationalists in the *Modern Review*. 'Indian national workers and reformers—with the exception of the heroic little band associated with the Bhil Seva Mandal—have neglected the tribes shamefully. The Congress has neglected them. The Liberals have neglected them. The Khadi workers have neglected them.'[90] Elwin decided to publicise the plight of the Adivasis in a series of articles, pamphlets and books.[91]

In these writings Elwin celebrated a culture which was as yet uncontaminated by 'civilisation'. At the very time he was writing, however, a movement was sweeping through the Gond community in which the people abandoned liquor-drinking, meat-eating, dancing, and singing. This was exactly the sort of movement that Gandhian workers had both encouraged and sought to build on elsewhere in India, and Elwin suspected that in this case the Adivasis were being manipulated.[92] This is unlikely, for—going by all of the detailed studies

we have of such movements—the chief initiative almost certainly came from the Adivasis. Elwin also believed that Adivasis who changed their way of life in this respect went 'flat, like stale beer: there was no more kick in them.'[93] He failed to see that considerable moral courage was required to sustain such a reformed way of life. Not only did reformed Adivasis bring themselves into conflict with members of their own community, but their initiative was often resented very strongly by local landlords, rich peasants, liquor dealers, and usurers, who saw it as a case of Adivasis getting ideas above their station. As a rule, they reacted with harsh repression. This was not an act of mere unthinking imitation, but rather a form of proud self-assertion with strong political dimensions.[94] In this respest the Gandhians were more in tune with the sentiments of the Adivasis who participated in such movements. Elwin's own work among the Gonds was soon jeopardized by the strength of the reformist movement, and in 1938 he even had to move his headquarters to a place where it was less pervasive.[95]

In the new Indian constitution of 1935, many Adivasi areas were designated as 'excluded' or 'partially excluded', which meant in effect that the Adivasis were considered too politically 'immature' to deserve any electoral representation. There was an important issue to be fought over here, but Gandhi and the Congress kept silent on the matter. Some Gandhians even agreed with the policy. Amrital Thakkar's second-in-command at the Bhil Seva Mandal, Lakshmidas Shrikant, wrote an article in *The Times of India* in 1938 in which he argued that the Bhils had no social cohesion or any sense of social responsibility, and were not suited for democratic forms of local government.[96] Elwin was in broad agreement with the policy as well, as he had by then come to the conclusion that paternalistic Britishers were likely to protect the interests of the Adivasis better than the high-caste Hindu Congressmen who would claim to represent them in the legislative councils. He argued that: 'This company of vegetarians and teetotallers would like to force their own bourgeois and Puritan doctrines on the free and wild people of the forests.'[97]

In 1938 Elwin went to meet Gandhi at Wardha to try to persuade him to take a more active interest in Adivasi issues, but found that 'for all his desire for Home Rule Mahatma Gandhi did not appear to think that the original inhabitants of India deserved any special consideration.'[98] Gandhi was however soon pushed towards a more active engagement with the issue through fear that the Adivasis might develop their own separatist sentiments. In 1938 an Adivasi Mahasabha was formed in Jharkhand to press for constitutional rights for the Adivasis of the region. Many of the Adivasis who were involved in this organization were Christian converts. It developed links with the Muslim League, which saw the party as a possible ally in its struggle against the Congress.[99] Gandhi was worried that, under Christian mission influence, the Adivasi would become 'de-Indianized'—as he put it—and that the Congress needed to provide a strongly Indian counter. He encouraged his followers to work amongst the Adivasis: 'They provide a vast field of service for Congressmen.'[100] An Adivasi Seva Mandal was established as a counter to the Adivasi Mahasabha; the president of this body was B.G. Kher, who had been Prime Minister of Bombay in the Congress ministry of 1937—9. Gandhi also added the topic of 'service of Adivasis' to a manifesto for the constructive programme—it had previously been absent.[101]

From this time on, Gandhi began to use the term Adivasi consistently when talking about this section of the population. He had always disliked colonial terms such as 'animist' or 'aboriginal', stating: 'We were strangers to this sort of classification—"animists", "aborigines", etc.—but we have learnt it from English rulers.'[102] In deference to his followers who had coined alternatives such as 'Raniparaj' or 'Girijan', he used these terms in the late 1920s and 1930s. Elwin had in 1938 changed the name of his organization to the Bhumijan Seva Mandal.[103] 'Bhumijan' meant 'people of the soil', and he seems to have preferred it to the Gandhian terms, which defined Adivasis in terms of their place of residence rather than in terms of their attachment to the earth. Elwin saw these people as the 'original inhabitants', and 'Bhumijan' came closer to this than the Gandhian terms. This did not, however, catch on.

The term 'Adivasi' was coined in Jharkhand and popularized by the Adivasi Mahasabha. Amritlal Thakkar seized on it and became a major advocate of its use. Gandhi, who then began to apply the term himself, even believed that Thakkar had coined it.[104] The term was disputed strongly by many Hindu nationalists, who saw its acceptance as a tacit acknowledgement that these supposed 'original inhabitants' had been displaced from their land by Hindu invaders. They preferred to think of these people as 'the imperfectly integrated classes of Hindu society' or 'backward Hindus' who had to be integrated fully into the Hindu mainstream.[105] Gandhi clearly rejected this argument, for he continued to deploy the term 'Adivasi' up until his death.

He feared, however, that the Adivasis might follow the example of the Muslim League and launch a series of campaigns for separate states. He anticipated that this would happen if the caste Hindus continued to grind the Adivasis under their heels.[106] The only way to prevent this, so far as he was concerned, was for nationalists to work amongst them in a selfless manner. If the government tried to ban them from Adivasi areas, they should court arrest and be prepared to go to jail.[107] In an address to the Congress workers of Midnapore district in Bengal—an area with a large Adivasi population—he stated: 'The 1935 Act had separated them [the Adivasis] from the rest of the inhabitants of India and had placed the "excluded areas" under the Governor's direct administration. It was a shame that they had allowed them to be treated like that. It was up to them to make the Adivasis feel at one with them.'[108] In the final three years of his life, he emphasized the need for such work in a way he had never done before, and he made a point of channelling Congress funds in that direction.[109]

This strategy succeeded in a broad way, for such separatist sentiments never became popular among the Adivasis of India in general, though they did in important parts of the northeast. In Jharkhand, for example, the Adivasi Mahasabha was routed by the Congress in the elections of 1946, putting paid to any further separatist moves at that juncture.[110] Many Gandhians went to work in Adivasi areas in the late 1940s and

early 1950s, in some cases as a reaction to the successful Communist Party mobilisation of particular Adivasi communities.[111] Ashrams were established with hostels and schools for Adivasi children. In this way, a generation of Adivasis was given a training that allowed them to represent their own communities within the liberal polity. In time, this led, inevitably, to them having to challenge the Gandhian paternalists who had nurtured them in the first place.

The Gandhian approach to Adivasis tended to focus on their education into citizenship. There was much less emphasis on the need to struggle for their rights within the polity through satyagraha. The process of education brought limited gains for a few Adivasis, but it failed to bring the more general emancipation that was hoped for. For most Adivasis, their experience since Indian independence was one of displacement, marginalization, and exploitation. British officials, foresters, and policemen were replaced by Indians who treated them just as badly, if not worse. They have had their lands seized from them by high-caste farmers, by bureaucrats who want to build large dams or mine valuable minerals or establish tourist resorts and wildlife reserves in their forests and hills. Their villages have not only been starved of state funding, but their lands have suffered severe ecological damage from rampant cutting of the forests by corrupt contractors and foresters and their political backers. Their agriculture has in consequence deteriorated to the extent that many Adivasis can no longer make a living from the land. They have been often forced to migrate out in search of work, in the process becoming victims of the harshest forms of exploitation.[112] Although nominally citizens of India, the majority continue in practice to be a colonized people. This state of affairs can only be resisted through struggle. This has led some Adivasis towards violent resistance, as for example within the Naxalite movement. Others, however, have resisted non-violently under a leadership that is inspired, broadly, by the Gandhian tradition, as in the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

16

Struggle for Identities Chamar Histories and Politics*

Ramnarayan S. Rawat

There are millions of people in India today who call themselves Chamars and [others] who also call them that. However, it is fully established by the *Chanvar Purana* that this word is 'Chanvar' and refers to the *suryavanshi* or royal lineage, who belonged to an influential family of rulers at the dawn of civilization.—U.B.S. Raghuvanshi, *Shree Chanvar Purana,* n.d.

Hence it is not incorrect to imagine that by erasing the glorious literature and history of their opponents, the *daityas-danavas-asurs,* and etc., by characterizing them as black and irrational people in their epics, they [the Aryans] had covered their tracks well. It is difficult to accept what the Brahman-pandits have said with regard to 80 per cent of the population [of India], that they are descendants of the natural-unnatural succession of an illegitimate or mixed *varna.*—Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu, *Bharat ke Adi Nivasiyon ki Sabhyata,* 1937

Chamar activists and intellectuals wrote the first histories of 'untouchables' in the early decades of the twentieth century, in response to those histories written by colonial and Hindu

historians. These histories took the form of the decennial censuses, caste and tribe surveys, and various ethno-historical and folkloric accounts which worked out a narrative of Chamars' 'untouchable' origins. Indian histories written by the Hindu middle-class literati from the late nineteenth century onward were concerned with celebrating the glorious Hindu past. Bharatendu Harishchandra and Raja Siva Prasad Simh were among a host of such writers in North India in the late nineteenth century whose histories of India were histories of caste Hindus.[1] In these histories there were no Chamars or Dalits, because they were not yet considered part of the Hindu community, nor were these writers concerned with 'untouchables' and their histories. In the context of Bengal, Partha Chatterjee has shown that there was no discussion of Dalits in the 'histories of [Indian] nations' published by the Hindu and Muslim middle-class intelligentsia.[2] Such writers offered little or no discussion of untouchability and caste inequalities and paid no attention to Dalit writers and activists. Hindus and Dalits inhabited two different worlds with separate agendas.

One example both captures the meaning of the Chamars' struggle of the 1920s–30s and brings into relief their overwhelming concern with the issue of untouchability and identity. Ramnarayan Yadvendu, an important member of the Jatav Mahasabha and founder of the All-India Jatav Youth League, wrote a history of Jatav Chamars. In it he highlighted a victory that is virtually absent from the pages of Indian historiography. The All-India Jatav Youth League, in its seventh session (at Ghaziabad in December 1937), celebrated the Uttar Pradesh government's decision to allow the use of 'Jatav' as a surname. This meant that Jatav students filling out official forms would 'no longer be required to use the other term [Chamar] along with their name, which was the case earlier'.[3] Struggle against the word 'Chamar', the supposed 'untouchability' of Jatav origins and occupations, and the daily humiliation that Jatavs were subject to has remained a central concern of Jatav historical writings and politics. Reading the wide range of Chamar and Dalit histories written in the first half of the twentieth century makes clear that the writers were not primarily concerned with

questions of economic equality, land distribution, economic injustices, or the anti-colonial struggles. Instead, they sought to reclaim the dignity of their community by questioning dominant Brahmanical theories of their origins. This subject was central to Chamar histories but of little or no importance in the histories written by caste Hindus.

The first step in the Dalit political struggle centred on the question of identity and the strategies of liberation that might overcome the 'untouchable' status assigned to them by the caste Hindus. How do we write about such struggles, and what meanings do they hold for historians? Generations of caste Hindu historians have been accustomed to writing about social and economic contradictions, anti-colonial and class struggles, but have never encountered the humiliation of being addressed as a Chamar.[4] During my fieldwork in Lucknow, Allahabad, Agra, and Delhi I was often bluntly asked about my caste identity. Many Dalits questioned my ability to write their history. I was asked how I could understand what it means to be an 'untouchable' in Hindu India. Many times I was told by Dalits that their struggle is against the Hindu interpretation of Dalit history. 'How can we have an "untouchable" past? How can you write a history that attributes untouchable origins to millions of people?' I was asked.

The epigraphs that open this chapter capture two significant moments in Chamar history. The first marks a beginning, and the second a qualitative shift. The first is representative of the Chamar histories that borrowed from the Hindu Puranic tradition to redeem and reclaim their past by claiming 'pure' Kshatriya status equal to that of the dominant Hindu castes. Such a claim was made not only by the Chamar histories discussed in the first section of this chapter, but also by the nature and character of Chamar politics in the 1920s, which negotiated their position within Hindu religion, especially within the form of religion propagated by the Arya Samaj. In their efforts to claim an equal status, discussed in the second section, Chamars questioned markers of their 'untouchability', especially *began* (unpaid labour) in the forms of agricultural work, leatherwork, and personal services to zamindars and government officials.

In the third section I re-examine the relationship between Chamar assertions of identity and the role of the Arya Samaj in creating new Hindu rituals and idioms to address Chamar concerns. Two assumptions have characterized Indian historiography on the Dalit movements of the first two decades of the twentieth century. First, almost all liberal and radical historians assume that Dalit histories must begin by critiquing Hindu religion and claiming the status of original inhabitants.[5] Second, these writers also assume that Hindu organizations like the Arya Samaj wanted to Hinduize Dalits in order to make them part of the Hindu community. Both of these assumptions ignore actual Chamar writings and fail to take seriously the agendas laid out by Chamars in their own histories and politics.

Those politics underwent a qualitative shift in 1928. Their second phase was marked by a new generation of histories that began to articulate an inclusive history of all Dalits: Chamars, Bhangis, Pasis, Dusadhs, and others. By the 1930s Chamar activists had raised a new set of issues and constituted an effective Dalit political force. This shift, discussed in the fourth and final section, first became evident in the mid-1920s with the emergence of the Adi-Hindu movement, which claimed that the Dalits were the original inhabitants of India. Rather than being included from the first phase of the Dalit struggle, this claim represents a second stage in the development of the Dalit movement. Only in the 1930s did Dalit histories take it up. The earliest Chamar and Dalit histories, far from critiquing Hindu religion (as many scholars have assumed), sought to establish high-caste origins for the Dalits.

The First Phase: Making Claims of Kshatriya Status

A series of Chamar histories were written and published in Uttar Pradesh during the first half of the twentieth century. The four that I take up for discussion are U.B.S. Raghuvanshi's *Shree Chanvar Purana* (between 1910 and 1916), the Jaiswar Mahasabha's *Suryavansh Kshatriya Jaiswar Sabha* (1926), Pandit Sunderlal Sagar's *Yadav Jivan* (1929), and Ramnarayan Yadvendu's *Yaduvansh ka Aitihas* (1942). Sagar and Yadvendu, who were Jatiyas, claimed a Jatav-Kshatriya status

by associating their lineage to the Yadav tribe of Lord Krishna. Jatiya Chamars were predominantly located in western Uttar Pradesh, with a large presence in the Meerut, Agra, Moradabad, and Badaun districts. Jaiswara Chamars were dominant in eastern Uttar Pradesh, where they asserted a Kshatriya status by claiming descent from the Chanvar dynasty. Jatiyas and Jaiswaras are the two major Chamar *jatis,* and together they constituted two-fifths of the Chamar population of Uttar Pradesh.[6]

Raghuvanshi's seventy-nine-page *Chanvar Purana* was published in Kanpur. The author was a lawyer in Aligarh, a prominent centre of Dalit politics in Uttar Pradesh, and by choosing the surname of Raghuvanshi he sought to underscore his learned status. The Jaiswar Mahasabha of Lahore's *Suryavansh Kshatriya,* a ten-page chapbook that had a printrun of a thousand, is a simplified retelling of the *Chanvar Purana* story. Written in a very accessible style, it addresses the Chamars directly, urging them to liberate themselves by reclaiming their true Kshatriya identity. The publication of these two texts, in Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh and Lahore in Punjab, is also an indication that the story of *Chanvar Purana* had become popular in North India, and it is thus worth discussing Raghuvanshi's themes and claims at some length.

My discussion of these overlooked Chamar narratives is intended to bring them into conversation with the colonial and Hindu histories of Chamar pasts. Without taking them seriously, we cannot even begin to appreciate and understand the focus of Chamar histories and critiques. Chamar histories were not produced in isolation, but were rather a part of the larger corpus of caste histories, or *vamsavalis,* written around this time. The themes and methodology of Chamar histories have much in common with those of the histories produced by the caste Hindu literati like Bhartendu Harishchandra from the late nineteenth century onward. Both Chamar and caste Hindu writers claiming Kshatriya status were borrowing from an already existing tradition which relied upon *itihasa-puranic* sources (using Puranas as historical texts). Even the colonial authors drew from these sources to account for the 'untouchability' of Chamar and other 'untouchable' castes. We cannot

understand Chamar histories unless we recognize that these Chamar writers were responding to colonial and Hindu representations of their caste, what Ranajit Guha has described as 'a question of power'.[7]

Raghuvanshi claimed that the *Chanvar Purana* was discovered by a *rishi* (sage) who lived in a cave in the high reaches of the Himalayas in Tibet, where he translated it, with great effort, from Sanskrit into Hindi for publication.[8] The *Chanvar Purana* testifies that the original name of the Chamars was 'Chanvar'. It tells us that in the *dwija kula* (pure or pious age) the present-day Chamars were powerful rulers belonging to the *suryavanshi* (royal Kshatriya) Chanvar dynasty. Raghuvanshi is aware that the sweeping claims being made in the *Chanvar Purana* may create doubts about the authenticity of the text. He therefore offers a reward to anyone 'who can prove that *Chanvar Purana* is false'. To him the text's legitimacy derives from the Puranic tradition in India. He draws the attention of Hindu society by writing, 'It is commendable that our Hindu brethren have such faith in the Puranas, and it is our humble request that they will show similar devotion to the *Chanvar Purana*', which is backed by the same evidence as the *Gurada Purana,* considering that Shri Narad Bhagwan, Lord Narada, is the narrator of both the texts.[9] He also adds that the *anushasan parva* (section) of the *Mahabharata* mentions the Chanvar dynasty as a Kshatriya caste that lost its status because of its members' failure to respect 'Brahmanical knowledge'.[10] Lord Narada recounts the story in the *deva lok* (abode of the gods), giving an account of the dynasty's glorious past and the reasons for its decline, and explaining how it acquired the name 'Chamar'. The *Chanvar Purana* predicts that Saint Raidas's birth in the Chamar community will mark the recovery of its lost status.

Both the *Chanvar Purana* and *Suryavansh Kshatriya* claim that the *Bhaktamala* (Bhakti literature) includes many stories of the greatness of Raidas in fifteenth-century Hindu society and his popularity among the ruling families.[11] According to these two texts, the truth about the Chamars and the Chanvar dynasty was revealed in the court of Lord Vishnu when Saint Raidas arrived in the *deva lok*. Upon his arrival 'the *deva lok* began to reverberate with the words "Chamar, Chamar" and

the frightened *devatas* [gods] began to fall at the feet of Lord Vishnu . . . Oh Lord! What a terrible tragedy, a Chamar in the *deva lok*?'[12] At the request of Lord Vishnu, Narada tells the story to the terrified *devatas* and the world. In the *satyug* age the Chanvars were the most powerful dynasty of India and of the world. They ruled the earth for many centuries and played a crucial role in spreading the Vedic religion. He describes in great detail the glorious lineage of this dynasty and the people who lived a charmed life under their rule.[13]

The greatest Chanvar king was Chamunda Rai, who was also the last king of the dynasty and was responsible for the eclipse and disappearance of the Chanvar *vansh* (lineage). A *rishi* had told his father the danger that Chamunda Rai posed, and after considerable anguish the king decided to sacrifice his son to save the *vansh,* but the *rani* (queen) tricked him into killing the son of her maid Shramkala instead. Shramkala helped the *rani* by not only suggesting the solution but also willingly offering her son. The king, thinking he had killed his own child, died of grief and remorse.[14] Following his death, the *rani* announced that the prince was still alive. The news was welcomed by all and Chamunda Rai was declared the new ruler.

Chamunda Rai followed the rules of *varnasharam dharm* (education, marriage, family), eventually retiring from social life to become an ascetic. His vigorous penance and devotion to Lord Vishnu earned him general praise and the respect of Vishnu. The *devatas* felt threatened by Chamunda Rai's growing reputation, and they conspired to destroy his standing by interrupting his prayer and ruining his dedication to Lord Vishnu. They connived with one of his enemies to avenge his humiliating defeat at Chamunda Rai's hands. Appearing in the guise of Shiva, Chamunda Rai's enemy questioned his devoutness and loyalty to Vishnu by pointing out that he had no statue of the god, and succeeded in convincing him to worship the god as *sagun* (having form) rather than *nigun* (formless).[15]

The *sagun* form of devotion is against the tenets of the Vedic religion. Chamunda Rai's adoption of it offended Lord Vishnu, who decided to

visit him in the guise of a Shudra (low-caste person) to test his dedication. The *Chanvar Purana* describes this encounter in great detail. Disturbing Chamunda Rai's worship, the Shudra questioned his devotion to Vishnu, on the grounds that he had adopted the *sagun* form of worship, and recited *shlokas* (verses) from the Vedas to assert his position. An already annoyed Chamunda Rai was furious at seeing a Shudra reciting the Vedas and admonished him, reminding him that his caste had no right to do so. Hearing this, Lord Vishnu appeared in his true form and 'replied that in this world a Shudra is one whose actions (karma) make the person a Shudra.' 'A man is not a Shudra merely because he is born in such a family.'[16] Readers are reminded of the oft-quoted Vedic saying that status is defined by actions and not by birth. Realizing his mistake, Chamunda Rai begged for forgiveness, but an enraged Lord Vishnu cursed him and his descendants out of Kshatriya status to a position even lower than Shudras, as Chamars and untouchables. Hence, the Chanvar *vansh* and its history disappeared from the Earth.

After appeals from various gods, including the sun god, who had been hiding in a cave, Lord Vishnu relented. The Chanvar dynasty would be revived in the age of *kalayuga* (the present dark age), when a *rishi* (Saint Raidas) would be born, who would bring Vedic knowledge back to the Earth and remove all ignorance. His appearance would allow this caste to rise up from their position as 'untouchables' and return to their original position as a Kshatriya caste.[17] The *Suryavansh Kshatriya* concluded by exhorting its readers, 'Dear friends! Please think, who are we and what's our worth? First we were Suryavanshi Kshatriyas and now we are called Chamars. Dear readers! Put your mind, soul, wealth, and knowledge to help our community which has forgotten its past; our welfare lies in its reawakening'.[18]

The Jatiya Chamars of western Uttar Pradesh also asserted a Kshatriya identity, as Jatavs or Yadavs, by claiming lineage from the Yadu tribe, whose most famous member was Lord Krishna. These claims were made in *Jatav Jivan,* first published in 1924, with a second (108-page) edition published in 1929 with the new title *Yadav Jivan.*

Sunderlal Sagar, the writer of the book, was a prominent activist and member of the Jatav Mahasabha of Agra, the organization that financed and published the book's two editions. Part 1 of the book looks at various aspects of the Jatiya Chamars' claim to Yadav status. Part 2 is a commentary on the 'clean' social and cultural practices that Sagar recommended to the Jatavs. Sagar also laid out a programme for the development of the Jatav caste and gave information about the aims and objectives of the Jatav Mahasabha. In 1946, Ramnarayan Yadvendu published an even longer book, entitled *Yaduvansh ka Aitihas.* Yadvendu rehearsed many of the arguments made in *Jatav Jivan,* and also provided an exhaustive history of various Jatav organizations and personal sketches of the members of the Jatav Mahasabha.

Sunderlal Sagar believed that 'we learn about each nation, country, lineage, and caste through its history', and he wrote the history of his caste because he wanted to enlighten his community about its glorious but forgotten past. The book is written in a question-and-answer format, with the author instructing an ignorant Jatav. It is the absence of history, the lack of knowledge of the community and its past, that has resulted in the degraded and impure status of the pure *yaduvansh* clan, claims Sagar. 'It is a matter of great sorrow that our fellow Jatav brothers are not able to give an appropriate answer to questions of their identity from the arrogant casteist.'[19]

Innovatively using evidence from contemporary sources, Sagar strengthens his case for Jatavs' Kshatriya status by borrowing from the Puranas and folklore. His first piece of evidence is taken from his personal experience and is part of what compelled him to revise the book. He claims that two Hindu lawyers opposed his attempt to record his surname as Yadav in the list of voters. He contested their decision in the court, and the commissioner of Agra, R.L.H. Clarke, accepted his claim of the Jatavs' social status. Sagar proudly quotes Clarke: 'Sunder Lal Yadav has written a book *(Jatav Jiwan)* which has been produced expressly to show that as a matter of fact all Jatwas are really Yadavas.'[20]

Sagar refers to Swami Atma Ram's *Gyansamundra,* written in 1888, which mentions the Kshatriya status of the Jatavs and their origins in

the *Shiv gotra* (lineage of Lord Shiva). He cites J.S. Nesfield's *Brief View of the Caste System of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh* (1882), which states that Jatavs 'may be an occupational off-shoot from the Yadu tribe from which Krishna came'; volume 4 of Edwin T. Atkinson's *Gazetteer* (1881), which mentions the superior status of the Jatavs in relation to the Aharwariyas; and Chohte Lal Kshatriya's *Brahman Decisions,* which refers to Jatavs as Kshatriyas.[21] Moving to Puranic and folkloric sources, Sagar narrates the story of Parashuram and his pledge to wipe out all the Kshatriyas. According to him, the Jatavs' ancestors fought against Parashuram. But the Kshatriyas were defeated, and to escape persecution the Jatavs disappeared from the Earth by hiding in the forests, becoming artisans to hide their Kshatriya identity and in the process losing their 'pure' status. Hindu discrimination against Jatavs began at that time.[22] Sagar tells his readers that 'Jatav' is an *apabhramsa* or corrupt pronunciation of 'Yadav'. On the authority of the *Mahabharata* and *Manusmriti,* he traces the Jatav lineage to the Raja Yadu and Krishna. He argues that Jatav surnames, like Sagar, Pipal, Kardam, Maurya, Son, Neem, Karnik, and Harit, were all linked to the lineages of Yaduvansh.[23]

The methodology of these histories was derived from the Hindu *itihasa-purana* traditions of history-writing. In a thoughtful discussion, Romila Thapar has described the *itihasa-puranic* tradition as 'embedded histories'. Non-Kshatriya dynasties claimed a Kshatriya status that was 'embodied in the *itihasa-puranic* tradition', and on those grounds declared their social and political legitimacy. Thapar has suggested that from the middle of the first millennium AD new ruling dynasties 'often observed the formality of claiming Ksatriya status' by using the *itihasa-puranic* tradition to claim genealogical ties with the royal families mentioned in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata.*[24] Such royal genealogies were a powerful source of social and cultural legitimacy and a unique feature of precolonial Indian polity.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the urban middle-class Hindu literati in North India borrowed from the *itihasa-puranic* tradition to question colonial interpretations of the Hindu past.

Vasudha Dalmia has argued that they utilized diverse sources from the Puranas and folklore to refute 'the authority of the Orientalists'. Dalmia mentions Bharatendu Harischandra, 'who as litterateur and amateur historian tried his hand at writing manifold histories in Hindi', and this example illustrates the point that borrowing from Puranic sources was an integral part of writing history in Hindi.[25] A comparison of Harischandra's 'Khatriyon ki Utpatti' (Origin of the Khatris) and the Chamars' histories reveals striking parallels in their methodology. Harischandra wrote this pamphlet in support of efforts by the Khatri community of Punjab, hitherto classified as Shudras, to claim a Kshatriya status for themselves.

Harischandra, inspired by the 'the new ethnologising trend', borrowed from popular folklore, Puranic sources, and Orientalist accounts to claim that even though the Punjabi Khatris were not occupationally Kshatriyas, they were nevertheless still Kshatriyas.[26] Borrowing from colonial accounts, Harischandra argued that Punjab was the original home of the Aryas in India, and the Khatris were their descendants because it was also their home. But because Punjabis cannot pronounce 'ksa', the word 'Kshatriya' came to be spoken and written as 'Khatri'. Harischandra recounted many popular stories to strengthen his claim. When Parashuram launched the war to eliminate the Kshatriyas, the Punjabi Kshatriyas went underground to preserve their lives, taking the name Khatri and following the customs and occupations of Vaishyas and Shudras. Harischandra quoted extensively from the ancient *Sarasangraha Purana* to support this origin story. He also argued that by adopting Shudra practices they escaped persecution at the hands of Emperor Chandragupta, who was of Shudra origin.[27] In addition to 'Khatriyon ki Utpatti', Harischandra also wrote a history of his caste entitled 'Aggarwalon ki Utpatti' (Origin of the Aggarwal Caste) in which he used a similar methodology to claim that the Aggarwals lost their Kshatriya status by giving up the Vedic religion.

There are striking parallels between Harischandra's histories of the Khatris and Aggarwals and the histories written by Chamar advocates three decades later. Raghuvanshi used the discovery of a new *Chanvar*

Purana to claim a *suryavanshi* past by creating a story from the familiar tropes of the *Mahabharata.* The key tropes are the birth of a genius son, who is predicted to be both a blessing and a disaster to the royal lineage; a maid's sacrifice of her own son to protect the son of the *rani;* Chamunda Rai's remorse; the curse of Lord Vishnu, that explains the lineage's present status; and signs of the reclamation of their Kshatriya status in the *kalayuga.* The Chamar stories utilize such familiar tropes, which are repeated in numerous stories in Hindi religious and secular literature. Both the Jatavs and the Jaiswaras claimed in their accounts that they had lost their true Kshatriya status because of persecution or punishment. The Jatiyas or Jatav Chamars of western Uttar Pradesh told the Parashuram story to explain their present 'impure' status.[28] Like Harischandra, Sagar focused on *apabhramsa* or corrupt pronunciation. Not only Harischandra but a whole generation of writers and advocates were writing in the context of Puranic texts and folklore. In their efforts to question dominant colonial and Hindu narratives of their past, Chamars used the same Puranic accounts to offer an alternative interpretation, with the immediate political objective of convincing the colonial state of their Kshatriya status.

The Puranic sources acquired a new authority in the colonial period that added to their importance in Indian society. The colonial officers and ethnographers relied on Puranic sources to explain the untouchability of the Dalits and the Shudra status of the lower castes in order to classify them as such in decennial censuses. The Uttar Pradesh census of 1865 for the first time systematically documented accounts of the origins of the Chamar caste, gathered from a variety of districts. In Moradabad, Farrukhabad, and Bareilly the caste was explained as deriving from 'an Aheer father and Koorme mother', both ostracized from their communities—the latter turned out for theft and the former for killing a cow. One colonial account explained that 'they took to the trade of skinning dead cattle and selling them, which is the occupation still followed by their descendants.' In Muthra it was claimed on the authority of the *Varaha Purana* that Chamars were the offspring of a Mallah (boatman) and a Chandala (outcaste) woman. Three explanations were offered from Agra: Chamars were 'descendent from a

Mullah by a Chundal woman', descended 'from a Soodr father and Nishad mother', or 'the offspring of a Bhungee woman and a Brahmin'.[29] Henry Elliot also noted that Chamars 'are said, on the authority of the *Varaha Purana,* to be descended from a Mallah, or Boatman and a Chandal woman.'[30] By citing many Hindu texts, such origin stories gained legitimacy in the eyes of colonial administrators. Colonial ethnographers—officers like Henry Elliot, Herbert Risely, M.A. Sherring, and William Crooke—subsequently quoted them as authoritative explanations of Chamars' history. Briggs argued that the origins of the term 'Chamar' lay in the *Rig Veda* and that the term had been mentioned in all the main Brahmanical texts.[31] Given this historical methodology, it is little wonder that Chamar and other Dalit historians adopted many of the same conventions, tropes, and strategies to present their histories in a different light.

The real strength of colonial ethnography lay in its power as a form of objective sociological knowledge. Let me quote a celebrated Indian anthropologist who in the 1990s compiled a series of volumes as part of the *People of India* project. In his introduction to the Chamars, Kumar Singh has this to say about their history: 'Their community name is derived from the Sanskrit word *charmakara,* meaning leather worker. Risley (1891) writes that, according to the Puranas, the Chamars descended from the union of a boatman and a Chandal woman. But scholars identify them with the Karewara or leather worker mentioned in the tenth chapter of Manu's *Dharmashastra.* The father of the caste was a Nishada (the offspring of a Brahman father and a Sudra mother) and the mother a Vaideha (offspring of a Vaisya father and Brahman mother).'[32]

The persistence of a framework that seeks to explain the Chamars' past in terms of their impure and mixed origin is striking. Rather than offering any new historical evidence, postcolonial narratives of Chamar history produced by dominant (and usually caste Hindu) historians simply cite the very same narratives offered by their British colonial forebears.

Popular Mobilization: Claiming Kshatriya Status

The themes outlined in the Chamar histories of the 1920s had a wider social base among the Chamars of Uttar Pradesh. Weekly police reports give evidence of Chamar protests and meetings between 1922 and 192 8.[33] Unfortunately, no such evidence exists for the period prior to 1922. Chamar protests, described in great detail in the weekly police reports, were not noted in the nationalist press. Hindi- language newspapers in Uttar Pradesh like *Pratap, Abhyudaya,* and *Aaj* began to report on them when Hindu reform organizations started their campaigns among Dalits. The Chamar movement is an indication of the first phase in the twentieth-century Dalit struggle in North India. A distinguishing feature of this phase is the adoption by Chamars of pure Hindu rites and practices, such as vegetarianism, and the abandonment of impure practices like eating beef and doing leatherwork, as part of their claim to Kshatriya status. In 1929 Sunderlal Sagar referred to the ongoing struggles among Chamars in western Uttar Pradesh, which he hoped would succeed in changing their status.[34]

Although Chamar protests were evident in many parts of the state, police reports indicate that the most organized and sustained agitation took place in western Uttar Pradesh. These protests were first noticed in 1922 in the districts of Meerut, Moradabad, Bulandshahr, Badaun, Bijnor, Bareilly, Pilibhit, Agra, and Aligarh. By 1923–4, evidence of Chamar protests had also appeared in the districts of Saharanpur, Etah, Etawah, Mainpuri, Muthra, Dehradun, Lucknow, Unnao, Kheri Sultanpur, and Partabgarh in central Uttar Pradesh and in eastern Uttar Pradesh in Benares, Jaunpur, Basti, and Gorakhpur.[35] But the police reports described the meetings and activities in western Uttar Pradesh as a 'movement'. In Moradabad we hear of 'a general revolt of Chamars', in Bulandshahr we are told that 'there is scarcely a large village not having trouble with the Chamars', and in Meerut it was noted that 'the Chamar movement continues to cause trouble.'[36] A notable feature of the movement in this region was the collection of donations during meetings to fund various reform activities, particularly schools for Chamar children. In 1922 and 1923 the money collected in these

meetings varied from Rs 200 to Rs 1000 in Moradabad and was as much as Rs 1500 in Rampur.[37] The meetings appear to have been fairly well attended, with an average attendance of five or six hundred and often as many as one or two thousand. In one case seven thousand Chamars met in Bijnor in 1924.[38] Chamar *sabhas* (organizations) and *panchayats* (councils) organized such gatherings in both eastern and western Uttar Pradesh.[39] In Moradabad, Bulandshahr, Meerut, Bijnor, Saharanpur, Jaunpur, and Basti such meetings provided a context to establish Chamar *sabhas*.[40] Yadvendu says that Jatav Mahasabha branches were set up in Etah, Bareilly, Muthra, Mainpuri, Etawah, and Agra.[41]

Chamars were keen to demonstrate their loyalty to the British government, a fact reflected in the resolutions passed at these meetings. They distanced their activities from the ongoing non-cooperation movement (1920–2) launched by the Congress. At Lalkati *tahsil* in Meerut a meeting of a thousand Chamars passed a resolution against the non-cooperation movement and pledged loyalty to the British government. Similar resolutions were passed in meetings in other places in Meerut.[42] In the Didauli *tahsil* of Moradabad, Chamars refused to allow members of the Congress and Khilafatists to speak and passed a resolution against the Congress.[43] In its annual conference held in April 1922, presided over by Babu Khem Chand, the Jatav Mahasabha passed a resolution pledging its support for the British.[44] In Bijnor a meeting of seven thousand Chamars criticized the Congress's demand for *swaraj* or independence.[45] Similar resolutions were passed in Badaun, Bulandshahr, Dehradun, and Kumaon.[46] Open hostility to the Congress forced the Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee to ask its district committees to build an egalitarian relationship with Chamars.[47] But in the eastern Uttar Pradesh district of Gorakhpur, the Congress's activists played an important role in communicating 'the message of nationalism to the lower castes [which] served to widen the influence and role of their *panchayats*'. A Congress activist named Babu Guru Prasad organized a *panchayat* at a gathering of '500 Chamars of *tahsil*

Bansgaon of Gorakhpur district' in February 1921 to undertake various reform activities.[48]

In their protests and meetings, the Chamars sought to claim Kshatriya status and emphasize their 'pure' and 'clean' ritual. By embracing many of the caste Hindus' practices they were trying to remove their 'untouchable' stigma. The Chamar *sabhas* were the most vocal advocates of abstaining from meat and alcohol. In his novel *Karmabhoomi,* Premchand identified three factors that defined Chamar untouchability: *daru-sharab, murda-mans, aur chamra* (drinking alcohol, eating beef, and doing leatherwork). One of the main characters, Amarkant, a caste Hindu and Congress activist who settles down in a Raidassi village somewhere in Haridwar, convinces the Chamars to give up the first two as a way of attaining a pure status like Hindus.[49] In eastern Uttar Pradesh, Dalit caste *panchayats* of Chamars, Dhobis, and Bhangis did pass resolutions 'not only to abstain from liquor and *ganja* but also meat and fish.' Shahid Amin described the adoption of such novel dietary taboos 'as an extension of the Gandhian idea of self-purification'.[50] Yet in other parts of Uttar Pradesh, especially in the western region, Chamar *sabhas* accepted the agenda of reform and the aspiration to Kshatriya status without outside intervention. Extensive debates over these issues at meetings in the districts of Moradabad and Meerut were regularly reported. In the *tahsils* of Chandausi, Sambhal, Rehra, Dilara, and Gujrala in Moradabad, the Chamars asserted a status similar to that of Jats, claiming to be vegetarian caste Hindus.[51] The Meerut district was particularly noted for the strength of this movement.[52] At a meeting of four thousand Chamars gathered from different parts of the district at Mowane *qasba* in November 1922, a series of resolutions were passed claiming Kshatriya status and committing to a purified lifestyle.[53] In Mainpuri a Chamar *sabha* was formed in May 1924 explicitly to claim Kshatriya status for Chamars.[54]

Chamars' vegetarianism and the purity of their living conditions were repeatedly mentioned in resolutions passed at meetings held

throughout the twenty-four districts of the state. Some *sabhas* instituted fines to enforce their new rules of purity.[55] Baba Ramchandra participated in the meetings of Chamar *sabhas* at Partabgarh and in surrounding districts.[56] In eastern Uttar Pradesh Gorakhpur was a major centre of reform and protest, particularly in Hata and Padrauna *tahsils.*'[57] In July 1926 Chamars passed resolutions in different areas of Benares to abandon the impure and defiling occupation of leatherwork and the practices of removing carcasses, skinning, and tanning.[58] Interesting details include the refusal of Chamars in Moradabad to repair and stitch shoes, the refusal to skin dead animals in the Siana *qasba* of Bulandshahr, and desertion of the occupation of *mochi* in the Rajpura *qasba* of Badaun. In Saharanpur town the Chamars sold their annual contract for hides to the Bhangis.[59]

Access to education, the opening of municipal schools for their children and the founding of their own independent private schools, was a very important part of the Chamar reform agenda. When Amarkant, the protagonist of Premchand's novel *Karmabhoomi,* decides to settle down in a Raidassi village, the Chamars ask him to open a school for their children and teach English.[60] Similar demands were made early on by Chamars in meetings at Meerut and Moradabad.[61] In Dehradun in October 1923 a Chamar meeting of two thousand people insisted on the right of Chamar boys to attend the municipal schools.[62] In Mainpuri Chamars decided in May 1924 that reform of their caste was not possible without the education of their children.[63] In Etawah, Chamars decided to start a school for their children instead of wasting their money on Hindu festivals.[64] Both Sunderlal Sagar and Ramnarayan Yadvendu emphasized that education for Chamar children was the best way to improve the position of their community.[65] Yadvendu even wrote a letter to the Hindi monthly *Chand* in September 1933 seeking money to help two Jatav students to enrol in higher education and asking Indian nationalists to take the initiative in such measures if they were genuinely interested in *achhutuddhar* (uplift of untouchables).[66]

Central to these issues of reform was the question of individual dignity. One way of reclaiming dignity was to mount a challenge against the humiliating practice of *begari.* Chamars protested against its numerous forms and the illegal cesses that they were required to pay to zamindars. *Begari* determined their collective identity in the eyes of Hindu society; all Chamars were expected to provide services on demand without expectation of payment, regardless of their economic position, whether they were prosperous *maurusi* or *ghair-maurusi* peasants or poor agricultural laborers. By the early decades of the twentieth century *begari* included cesses, *hari* (agricultural services like plowing), and *nazrana* (tribute), all of which were used by the zamindars to illegally increase rent.[67] In addition to zamindars, touring officials of the state also requisitioned *begari* services, including the provision of grass, firewood, straw, fowl, eggs, meat, and milk, as well as various kinds of manual services, from pitching tents to cooking.[68] Premchand's 1922 novel *Premashram* captures the meaning of *begari* in the lives of Chamars by providing us a graphic description of how Chamars from neighbouring villages were forcibly rounded up and confined by the zamindars servants in the collector's camp to work for long hours without food or pay.[69]

In the 1920s protests against *begari* and other extortions were a central feature of the Chamar and Dalit struggles. Chamars in the Awadh region participated in the Kisan Sabha agitation of 1921—2 which fought against *bedekhli* (eviction) and *begari.* Protests against *begari* continued even after the movement ended. They were noted in many districts of western Uttar Pradesh, including Meerut, Moradabad, Bulandshahr, Aligarh, Saharanpur, Agra, Bijnour, Muthra, Aligarh, Bareilly, Etah, Kanpur, and Etawah—all districts where a significant number of Chamars possessed *maurusi* and *ghair-maurusi* tenure rights. Police reports from Meerut, Moradabad, and Bulandshahr compared the Chamar movement to the *aika* (unity) movement in Awadh, since both raised the issues of *begari* and illegal cesses.[70] A report by the Hindi weekly *Pratap* in April 1928 commented on the two-day conference organized by the Raidass Sabha of Kanpur to

demand the abolition of *begari* and similar practices.[71] In this region *begari* included police demands to remove dead bodies and other such menial tasks.[72] In the eastern districts of Uttar Pradesh, like Azamgarh, Jaunpur, Allahabad, Benares, Ghazipur, and Gorakhpur, however, protest against *begari* was less evident than the promotion of vegetarianism and purity.[73] This difference is an indication of the strength of the zamindars in eastern Uttar Pradesh, who favoured reform movements.

As in other lower-caste reform movements, women were an important subject of reform. But the Chamar movement was not unanimous on the topic. In western Uttar Pradesh Chamars repeatedly asserted that their women should be confined to their houses and put in purdah. Indeed, such resolutions were passed in rural and urban areas of Moradabad, Meerut, Bulandshahr, Muthra, Saharanpur, Agra, Dehradun, and Bijnor.[74] In Dehradun and Saharanpur it was recommended that 'women should wear dhotis [saris] at home and stay at home and not go out to sell grass in bazaars.'[75] By removing women from production processes and eliminating their contributions to the family income, Chamar men were domesticating them, removing them from public spaces and asserting a new form of patriarchy modelled on caste Hindu norms. These resolutions were in sharp contrast to the position laid out by Chamars in eastern Uttar Pradesh, who strengthened women's roles by demanding better payment for their work as *dais* and agricultural labourers. For example, in the Rudhali area of Basti district in eastern Uttar Pradesh, Chamars demanded wages for their women's work as *dais*.[76] These demands were an important dimension of the protest against *begari*.

The east–west divide was also evident in another reform that was popular among Chamars of western Uttar Pradesh but not in the east. Many Chamar groups in the west were redefining their relationship with Muslims as part of their efforts to claim a socially superior and clean status in Hindu society. They did not want to end all social interactions with Muslims, but ceased to take food (cooked or

uncooked) from Muslims and refused to dine with them, adopting caste Hindu practices. These restrictions on social interaction with Muslims were an important element of Chamar reforms in western Uttar Pradesh from very early on. Such resolutions were made in meetings and conferences held between 1922 and 1926 in the western Uttar Pradesh districts of Bulandshahr, Moradabad, Dehradun, Saharanpur, Meerut, and Muthra.[77]

A notable feature of Chamar protests in this period is that discussions and debates were held before any decision was made. A disagreement was aired at a meeting of the Jatiya Chamar Sabha in June 1923 in Meerut city. Chamar representatives from Meerut city agreed with most of the reforms on the agenda, but opposed abandoning the tanning and shoe trades, an indication that they had found prosperity in these trades in the cities. These urban Chamars threatened to break marital ties with Chamars in the countryside and send back recently married brides.[78] The Chamars of Lucknow also opposed the decision of the Kanpur Chamars to excommunicate members of the community who continued to 'skin and tan the animals'.[79] In a 1923 meeting attended by nine thousand Chamars at Rampur *tahsil* in Saharanpur district, in which the Arya Samaj played a leading role, a total of Rs 1500 was collected for the cause of Chamar reform. One faction of the meeting, led by the Aryas, wanted to build a temple, while another was equally keen on using the money to build a school. This latter group had little interest in converting Chamars to Hinduism. As a mark of protest against the ultimate decision to build a temple, many of them walked out of the meeting.[80]

The Response of the Arya Samaj: A Reassessment

William Pinch has argued that the *jati* reformers of the twentieth century claimed a Vaishnava religiosity by advocating a pure lifestyle, which meant abstaining from beef and liquor, confining women to the home, and abandoning practices like gambling and polygamy, which were increasingly considered social evils. A crucial feature of such a religiosity was establishing 'genealogical ties to either Ram or Krishna,

the well-known avatars of Vishnu.' Reform on the basis of Kshatriya identity was adopted not just by 'the major peasant *jatis*' of Shudra castes like the Kurmis and Ahirs but also by 'communities that often combined traditional occupations with agriculture', like Kalwars, Tambulis, Kahars, Tantis, and Malis.[81] We may also add Chamars to this list. But the Hindus and the British accepted the Shudra castes' claim of Kshatriya status while refusing that of the 'untouchable' Chamar caste. The Mahar advocates of Maharashtra, in an 1890 petition to the British, made a similar claim to Kshatriya status in order to qualify for recruitment into the army. Shivram Janba Kamble, the most prominent Mahar leader prior to Ambedkar, founded and edited a Mahar newspaper entitled *Somwanshiya Mitra,* which also argued for Mahars' Kshatriya origins.[82]

The Arya Samaj responded to the Chamar claims in the 1920s by addressing two inequalities in Hindu society that were criticized by Chamars: access to temples and to public wells.[83] The Hindu Mahasabha also addressed this issue at a 1923 Benares conference by offering 'untouchables' access to schools, temples, and public wells, but opposed their *shuddhi* or purification. Jordens has argued that the Arya Samaj forced a compromise on the Hindu Mahasabha by demanding the *shuddhi* of Chamars, promoting the adoption of Vedic rituals among Chamars, and encouraging closer social interaction with the caste Hindus through interdining. Despite the Hindu Mahasabha's official opposition to the *shuddhi* of Dalits, it allowed its local branches and other Hindu bodies to make their own decisions, and in Uttar Pradesh the Hindu Mahasabha fashioned its approach to the matter in response to competition from the Arya Samaj.[84] Chamars were very receptive to the Arya Samaj's agenda, and the relationship between them was further cemented by opposition from orthodox Hindus who saw the Arya Samaj as just as radical as Chamar reformers. From its small beginning in 1923 in the Arya Samaj, the *shuddhi* movement peaked in 1925, after which it petered out, largely because of the rise of the Adi-Hindu movement. Mainstream Hindi nationalist newspapers like *Pratap* and *Abhyudaya* in Uttar Pradesh began to report the Arya

Samaj's *shuddhi*-related activities in March 1924, as did the weekly police reports.[85] A vocal advocate of 'untouchables' in the Hindu Mahasabha, Swami Shraddhananda launched *shuddhi* activities among them in 1924.[86] The activities of these organizations were primarily confined to western Uttar Pradesh, where they targeted well-off Chamar cultivators, and a few locations in the east, in Gorakhpur and Benares districts.[87] The Arya Samaj had established a fair number of Raidass *sabhas* and *achhutuddhar sabhas* in different parts of western Uttar Pradesh.[88]

By adopting measures designed to support their claim of clean status and questioning the practice of *begari,* the Chamars were asserting a status equal to that of caste Hindus. Nandini Gooptu describes the Jatav protest in the 1920s in Agra and surrounding rural areas as an effort to claim 'higher status and respectability through "sanskritisation"'.[89] But Chamar protest against the existing structures of domination can be better understood as a demand for equal status. In recent years scholars have reminded us of the inadequacy of M.N. Srinivas's model of sanskritization by subjecting it to a range of criticisms. David Hardiman has offered an insightful suggestion by arguing that protest by *adivasis* or tribal people in Gujarat sought to deprive the dominant Hindu classes 'of their power of domination' by appropriating their value systems. He suggests that 'one great strength to such programmes of assimilation to dominant values—as opposed to programmes of outright rejection of such values—was that they provided a meeting point between the adivasis and certain progressive members of the dominant classes.'[90] In Uttar Pradesh the Arya Samaj facilitated the creation of such a 'meeting point' with the Chamar protesters. From the Chamars' point of view the Arya Samaj certainly played a crucial role, because it criticized Hindu practices like untouchability and organized efforts to open temples and wells to them.

Pratap and *Chand,* two journals with a liberal and social reform agenda, welcomed the Arya Samaj's decision to challenge Hindu orthodoxy on the issue of untouchability. Published in Hindi from

Kanpur and Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh in the first half of the twentieth century, *Pratap* and *Chand* were extremely influential in North India. North Indian Hindi literati and journals appreciated the *shuddhi* and *sangathan* efforts of the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha because they believed these two organizations could change the orthodox values of Hinduism and Hindu society.[91] The Hindi literati in North India believed that Chamars and other Dalit castes were Hindus who had to be protected from Muslims, Christians, and the British by securing their rightful place in Hindu society. In 1925 Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi praised the Calcutta session of the Hindu Mahasabha for raising the question of *achhut* and criticized the *sanatanists* (fundamentalists) who opposed such an agenda: 'Hindu Mahasabha had the courage to put Dalit Hindus into the category of humans.' In a long editorial entitled 'The Short-Sightedness of the Hindus', Vidyarthi criticized the Marwari Samaj, among others, for creating obstacles in the name of *sanatani* religion—obstacles which impeded the service that the Hindu Mahasabha was performing for the Hindu community. He reminded readers that 'every week 2000 [Dalit] Hindus are becoming Christians' and that they were also 'rapidly multiplying as Muslims'.[92] His description of them as 'Dalit Hindus' shows that Vidyarthi had no doubts about the religious identity of all 'untouchables'; they could only be Hindus. *Chand* also shared this concern, and an editorial in its special *achhut* issue argued that Muslims and Christians were converting Chamars en masse, while the practice of untouchability was bringing Hindu society into crisis.[93] In another editorial *Chand* claimed that 'in north India our battle is with Muslims, and in the south it is with Christians.'[94]

In another editorial, Vidyarthi discussed the decision of some five thousand Chamars in Badaun to convert to Islam as a protest against the practices of *begari* and untouchability. He described this move as making a 'business out of religion' and quoted a Chamar as saying that 'many Chamars agree that the Hindu religion is better than Islam, but we will decide which is more profitable to us.'[95] By portraying Chamars' concerns as a petty game of profit and loss, Vidyarthi was urging

reform-minded Hindus to join in his struggle against the *sanatanists* who were bent on destroying the Hindu community. Supporting Chamar struggles was for him a means to another end rather than an end in itself. *Chand* claimed that the position of Chamars was an ethical and economic issue that could be solved only by enlightening all sections of Hindu society.[96] Vidyarthi congratulated the Hindu Mahasabha for passing a resolution at its 1926 Delhi conference to begin *achhutuddhar.* Although he remarked that the efforts were not sufficient, he praised the fact that they had at least begun, despite opposition from the *sanatanis*.[97]

Such positions in the editorials of two recognized liberal journals, *Pratap* and *Chand,* stand in sharp contrast to a general consensus in Indian historiography on the relationship between the Arya Samaj and Chamars.[98] It is widely believed that the Arya Samaj entered the villages and colonies of Dalits to 'communalize' and 'Hinduize' them. In his 2000 study, Vijay Prashad asserts that the Congress did not formulate a reform agenda for the Dalits, but rather formulated an agenda 'in favour of the Hindu militants from 1917 to 1993' which emphasized *shuddhi* and *sangathan.* Located in an elitist framework, Prashad's discussion does not acknowledge Dalit autonomy or ability to negotiate with and respond to the Arya Samaj.[99] Gooptu's 2001 study suggests that by the beginning of the twentieth century the 'untouchable' leaders and 'the mass of the untouchables . . . had increasingly become the targets of caste uplift initiatives' by the Arya Samaj. She maintains that the Arya Samaj was primarily concerned with bringing 'untouchables' within a 'pan-Hindu community' through *shuddhi* and social uplift. This is how she explains Swami Achhutanand and Babu Ram Charana's rejection of the Arya Samaj in the early 1920s.[100] From this elitist perspective, Chamars are mostly the 'targets' of the Arya Samaj, in which Chamars and other Dalit castes had no say or role. Gooptu never discusses what had initially prompted the two luminaries and leaders of Chamar activism to join the Arya Samaj. Rather than assuming that Dalits played only a passive role in Arya Samaj initiatives, understanding the Dalit agenda in the 1920s and

1930s and the reasons for shifts within this agenda helps to reframe the question by asking what encouraged Dalits to enter into a relationship with the Arya Samaj in the first place. Instead of assuming that Dalits played a passive role as targets of Arya Samaj reform, we can see the Arya Samaj as playing a significant role, for a time, within Dalits' own agendas.

The logic of the Chamar claim of clean, Kshatriya status provided what Hardiman has called a 'meeting point' between Chamar agendas and reformist Hindu organizations like the Arya Samaj. It was not just Swami Achhutanand and Babu Ram Charana but a whole generation of Dalit ideologues and activists who were members of the Arya Samaj in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In the urban centres of Uttar Pradesh, such as Agra, there was a good deal of interaction between the Jatav Mahasabha and the Arya Samaj.[101] The first and second generations of activists belonging to the Jatav community were educated in schools run by the Arya Samaj. The early Chamar advocates Pandit Sunderlal Sagar and Ramnarayan Yadvendu were both educated in Arya Samaj schools, and both of their families were members of the Arya Samaj.[102] The first Jatav organization, the Nagar Jatav Committee, was established in 1888 in Agra city by leading Jatavs, and it advocated the Arya Samaj lifestyle of vegetarianism and Vedic teachings. A Jatav Mahasabha was established in 1917, also in Agra city, and by 1924 branches had been established in Etah, Bareilly, Muthra, Etawah, and smaller towns surrounding Agra.[103] In Aligarh city Paras Ram established a Jatav Mahasabha with support from the leaders of the Agra Jatav Mahasabha.[104] Swami Achhutanand, who was educated in an army school, joined the Arya Samaj in 1905 and worked with it until 1918. He established and taught in an Arya Samaj school in Mainpuri district and was an active member of its *shuddhi* programme.[105] According to Lajpat Rai, the Arya Samaj had opened schools throughout the western districts of Uttar Pradesh that were open to Chamars.[106] In March 1925 *Pratap* reported that it had opened some thirty-seven schools in different parts of Uttar Pradesh, among which the Kumar Ashram in Meerut, established by Algu Rai Shastri, was the

most famous.[107] The ideals of the Arya Samaj had a particular appeal to Chamars because they strengthened their claim to superior status.[108]

In Punjab the Arya Samaj 'provided an organizational model' and a 'maternal context in which [the Ad Dharm] movement was conceived, and from which it grew'. Many members of the Ad Dharm movement in Punjab had a 'certain sympathy for the Samaj' because 'it had done much to bring enlightenment and egalitarian beliefs' to the Dalit neighbourhoods.[109] Indeed, because of its activities among Dalits in Punjab, members of the community were always attracted to the Arya Samaj.[110] By opening schools and establishing Dalit organizations in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Arya Samaj gained popularity in Punjab. For instance, Dalit members of the Arya Samaj established the Dayanand Dalit Udhar in Hoshiarpur, Achhut Udhar, and the Jat Path Torak Mandal in Lahore. The first generation of Dalit leaders was educated at Arya Samaj educational institutions with economic support from the institutions.[111] The Arya Samaj raised similar issues and founded similar initiatives among Chamars and Dalits in western Uttar Pradesh. And in the 1920s the Mahars led by Ambedkar in Maharashtra were waging similar struggles for the rights of 'untouchables' to use public wells and to enter Hindu temples.[112]

The Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha used *shuddhi* extensively to provide Chamars with access to public wells while at the same time taking into account Hindu concerns with purity. *Shuddhi* made Chamars acceptable to caste Hindus.[113] By encouraging them to abstain from consuming meat and alcohol and to adopt Hindu rituals like evening prayers and the singing of *bhajans* (devotional songs), the Arya Samaj sought to cleanse Chamars of their 'impure' status. It laid out this strategy at its annual *achhutuddhar* conference in Kanpur in July 1925 and in other places, including Aligarh, Jhansi, and Agra.[114] Lajpat Rai, as its chief spokesperson, asked Chamars to adopt Hindu rituals, like marriage and funeral rites, in order to become 'good' Hindus.[115]

A typical Arya Samaj drive would involve purifying Chamars through a *shuddhi* ceremony, which would be followed by a procession of Chamars to the public well to proclaim their rights to use the well and enter a temple. Such initiatives were undertaken in most districts of western Uttar Pradesh, from Pilibhit and Dehradun in the north to Jhansi in the south, Meerut in the east, and Mainpuri in the west.[116] The right to enter temples and bathe in the river Yamuna during the Garhmukteshwar fair was first demanded in March 1923, in Meerut city.[117] In Benares, Chamars demanded access to the Vishwanath temple and to the Dashavmegha ghat for bathing.[118] In Allahabad, Purshottam Das Tandon and Malaviya led Chamars to the temples of Alopi Devi in Prayag and of Mahabir. Both were later purified by priests.[119] The Arya Samaj also used the Hindu festivals of Holi and Dussehra to incorporate Chamars into an imagined Hindu community of equals. Such functions were organized in Meerut city, Bulandshahr, Agra, Moradabad, Pilibhit, Bijnor, and Muthra, where Hindus were urged to embrace Chamars in the festivals.[120]

Conversion was one way of freeing oneself from the stigma of 'untouchability'. The possibility that Chamars might convert to Islam or Christianity in an effort to obtain equal treatment frightened Hindu organizations, which responded with alacrity to Chamar demands. In Bulandshahr in 1923 the threat to convert won Chamars access to a public well in a Hindu neighbourhood of the city which had previously been restricted.[121] In Agra, Kanpur, and Meerut, the threat was used to demand the right to participate in Hindu festivals, like Dussehra and Holi, from which Chamars had been excluded.[122] In Agra city in 1924 Hindus allowed some two thousand Chamars to enter and perform *puja* at the Mankameshwar temple, the most important temple in the city.[123] In September 1926 in Bareilly, Chamars put up posters 'demanding end to all caste distinctions within Hindu religion', failing which they vowed to convert to Islam.[124] A similar threat was repeated in the last week of September 1926, a week of *achhutuddhar* activities organized by the Arya Samaj in Agra, Kheri, Allahabad, and Benares.

Once again Chamars threatened that unless Hindus gave them equal status they would convert to Islam or Christianity.[125] In Padrauna *tahsil* of Gorakhpur some 750 Chamars converted to Christianity, as did others in Meerut, Bulandshahr, Etawah, and Moradabad.[126] Hazari, a Chamar from eastern Uttar Pradesh, experimented with multiple alternatives, becoming a Hindu purist, becoming a Congressman by wearing 'a Gandhi cap', becoming a Muslim, and finally converting to Christianity.[127]

As Chamars took the initiative by converting or threatening to convert to Islam, Muslim groups responded by actively seeking Chamar converts. At Deoband in Saharanpur and in Moradabad, Bijnor, Bulandshahr, and Dehradun, Muslim organizations mobilized resources to preach Islam in Chamar villages.[128] As part of its larger programme for *tabligh* (purity) and *tanzim* (unity), the Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Hind of Deoband School in Saharanpur district sent volunteers to villages in western districts of the province.[129] In Agra and Meerut city the Jamiat distributed leaflets welcoming Chamars into Islam, a religion of equals.[130] The most widely reported mass conversion occurred in Badaun district in May 1925, with five thousand Chamars embracing Islam. Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi explained that Chamars were incensed at their humiliation at the hands of Hindu society.[131]

Lala Lajpat Rai had predicted that the twin agendas of the Arya Samaj, *shuddhi* and *achhutuddhar,* would be far more difficult to carry out in 'the home of Hindu orthodoxy'.[132] Indeed, there was scarcely a district in Uttar Pradesh where the Arya Samaj's efforts to gain Chamars access to public wells were not opposed. In some cases where Chamars were allowed access, the wells were later publicly purified. Orthodox Hindus would frequently prevent Chamars from participating in their festivals and ceremonies, using wells, and entering temples. These sections of Hindu society began to protest against the efforts being made by Chamars and the Arya Samaj.[133] In some towns, including Kanpur and Meerut, the temples were guarded by '*lathi* [club]-wielding volunteers' ready to defend the Hindu religion by preventing Chamars

from entering. Premchand vividly describes such a defence in his 1924 novel *Karmabhoomi,* which takes place in the city of Benares.[134] The support and participation of the Arya Samaj hardened the attitudes of orthodox Hindus and the dominant peasant communities of western Uttar Pradesh, like the Jats, Gujars, and Chauhans.[135] Purification of Chamars through *shuddhi* did not change *sanatani* Hindus' perceptions of them; they still considered Chamars 'untouchables' and therefore refused them access to Hindu spaces.[136] On occasion Hindus and Muslims joined in protesting against Chamars' effort to use public wells. Such joint protests occurred in the towns of Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, and Saharanpur.[137]

Hindu leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai, Malaviya, and Sampurnanand tried to cajole orthodox Hindus by pointing out that 'Chamars could leave the Hindu religion and become Muslims and Christians if caste Hindus did not change their attitudes.'[138] The Arya Samaj even organized conciliatory meetings between Chamars and Hindus, such as one held in Meerut city in 192 3.[139] It also organized an *achhutuddhar* week, 22–28 March 1928, in the major towns of Uttar Pradesh, appealing to Hindus to treat Chamars as equals by allowing them 'to enter temples and draw water from public wells'.[140]

Reminding Chamars of their Hindu identity and including them within a larger Hindu community were among the primary objectives of the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha.[141] In Najibabad town in Bijnor district, *shuddhi* meant rejecting Muslim customs and practices, and on another occasion the term was used to prevent them from purchasing at Muslim shops.[142] In Ballashahpur *tahsil* of Jaunpur district Chamars were asked to protect cows, and in Badlapur village they were asked to take up cleaner occupations, weave *khadi* cloth, and become vegetarians.[143] In Hamirpur district the Hindu Mahasabha campaigned in Chamar villages against cooperating with Muslims during the Islamic sacred month of Muharram.[144] *Shuddhi* was aiming at satisfying Hindus by showing, in the words of a Congressman

speaking at a Chamar meeting at Mainpuri, 'that they had really changed their mode of living'.[145] Still, although *mochi* Chamars of Bansgaon *tahsil* of Gorakhpur and of Singramau *tahsil* of Jaunpur decided to use only *murdari* cattle for leather, avoiding the *halali* cattle they got from Muslims, they refused to change their occupation. Similarly, the Chamars of Raidassi village in Premchand's *Karmabhoomi* agreed to abstain from eating beef and drinking alcohol, but not from leatherwork.[146]

The Arya Samaj was the only Hindu organization that, institutionally and actively, addressed some of the concerns raised by the Chamars in the second decade of the twentieth century. The initiatives launched by the Arya Samaj also motivated local members of the Hindu Mahasabha to participate in the programmes. By claiming Kshatriya status and adopting clean Hindu practices, Chamars had laid out an agenda of reform and created a 'meeting point' where they could join with sections of Hindu society, like the Arya Samaj, who were receptive to some of their concerns.

The Second Phase: Emergence of the Adi-Hindu Movement

The second stage in the evolution of a Chamar agenda represents a radical departure from the first stage, which lasted from 1922 to 1928. Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi noted this shift in an editorial of 27 April 1925. The second stage, he wrote, was marked by the 'birth of a new Adi-Hindu movement in north India' among the *achhuts* of Uttar Pradesh, led by Swami Achhutanand. Vidyarthi underlined the popularity of the Adi-Hindu movement from Delhi to Kanpur, and especially in the Agra-Etawah region of western Uttar Pradesh.[147] In their biographies of Swami Achhutanand the Chamar writers Mangal Jatav and Rajpal Singh put the first meeting of the Adi-Hindu movement in Etawah in December 1923.[148] In 1926 police reports began to mention meetings in Etawah, Allahabad, and Kanpur in which Achhutanand declared that *achhuts* were the original inhabitants and rulers of India.[149] Despite these early signs, the December 1927 All-India Adi-Hindu conference organized by Swami Achhutanand can be

taken as the foundation of the movement, when its programme was formally announced. The movement acquired a formidable presence in western and central Uttar Pradesh in 1928.

A decade later, in 1937, Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu published *Bharat ke Adi Nivasiyon ki Sabhyata* (The Civilization of India's Original Inhabitants) in Lucknow. Even though Jigyasu was a close associate of Swami Achhutanand, he was not a Dalit. Mahant Bhodanand Mahasthavir also made a similar claim in his 1930 book *Mool-Bharatvasi aur Arya* (Original Indians and Aryas). We know of it only because Mahasthavir mentioned his own work in his introduction to Jigyasu's book. Jigyasu addressed not just Chamars or Dalits but 80 per cent of India's population—peasants, workers, artisans, lower castes, tribal peoples, and 'untouchables'. His work is the first conception of *bahujan* (oppressed majority) politics by a Chamar intellectual and activist. But despite his inclusive vision, the issues he raised primarily concerned the Dalits. Jigyasu opened his book with an appeal to all Dalits: Adi-nivasi friends! Embrace this true glorious history, which the Arya *jati* destroyed through their cunning and deceit. Read this to erase from your mind weakness, confusion, shame; open your heart like a lotus to the light of reawakening.'[150]

Jigyasu's call reflects the efforts of Dalit intellectuals of the 1920s to retrieve a history of 'untouchables' from Brahmanical sources. They saw the unearthing and recovery of a Dalit history erased by the Aryans and the Hindus as the new agenda of Dalit historiography. But in this second phase, Dalit activists and writers unanimously rejected 'what the Brahman-pandits have said with regard to 80 per cent of the population, that they are descendants of the natural-unnatural succession of an illegitimate or mixed *varna*.' According to Jigyasu, the victorious Aryans had erased 'the glorious literature and history of their opponents, the *daityas-danavas-asurs,* by characterizing them as black and irrational people in their epics.'[151] Because of this, no historical records remained with which to write a history of Dalit and Shudra *jatis*.

Jigyasu noted that an intelligent reader of the Vedic and Brahmanical poems celebrating the victory of the Aryan rulers over the non-Aryans would naturally wonder about the people mentioned as *asurs, dasas, daityas,* and *danavas.* The Vedic literature also mentions that these people lived in cities and forts. Who were these people who lived in cities and forts? They were known in the three worlds. They worshipped Shiv-mahadev and ruled India during the times of *satyug.* Under their rule dharma existed in its true form, truth prevailed, and people lived for one hundred thousand years. What, then, happened to the children of these honest, *daitya-danav* ancestors? We do not have their literature which might have told us about their history. The little evidence that we have comes from the Vedic, Puranic, and Brahmanical literature.[152]

Vedic and Brahmanical literature provides many examples of the superiority and greatness of the Adi-Hindu civilization. For instance, Jigyasu quoted from Nehru's *Glimpses of World History* and from the work of Sir John Marshall to claim that the Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro civilizations were pre-Vedic and belonged to the ancestors of the Adi-Hindus. The Rig Vedic hymns praising the victory of the Aryans also tell us about the valor of *dasas* and *asurs* and the destruction of their forts and cities. He also borrowed from contemporary histories being taught in Allahabad and Benares universities to claim that the Indus civilization predated the Aryans and belonged to the original inhabitants, who were Adi-Hindus.[153] At the same time he cited Puranic sources like *Amarkosha* to claim that the *daityas-danavas* and *asurs* were India's original inhabitants, who had opposed the invasion by the *devatas* or the Aryans. On the basis of this evidence he claimed that the *asurs, daityas,* and *danavas* were the rulers of India during the *satyug,* a period of great prosperity. Among the rulers he named were Raja Vikra, Vidhvatsa, Vairochan, Mutchkand, Bhairav, Nandak, Andhak, Hiranyaksh, Hiranyakashyap, Prahlad, and Bali. King Bali was the greatest of all, and his might is acknowledged in the Aryan literature. The Aryans feared him because he had established a fair and egalitarian rule. Bali ruled during Vedic times, but was defeated and killed by the Aryans because he refused to accept Vedic values.[154]

Jigyasu borrowed from colonial ethnographic theories of the racial origins of Indian society that were current among Indian scholars to argue that in India the Dravids and non-Aryan social groups were separate ethnic groups, distinct from the Aryans. He quoted Grierson's linguistic survey to argue that his research had proved beyond a doubt that Prakrit and Pali were older languages than Sanskrit and were spoken by the Adi-Hindus. According to him, most of the contemporary regional languages of India, including Hindi, emerged from Prakrit.[155]

What is interesting is the mode of historical reasoning Jigyasu employed. In putting forward his argument, he broke with the *Chanvar Purana* by citing contemporary works by caste Hindu and British historians. He provided references in footnotes to strengthen his claim that his work was well researched. Most striking are the grounds upon which he claimed that *dasas, dasyus,* and *asurs* were his ancestors. Jigyasu made a virtue of the absence of evidence that Dalits are descended from non-Aryans by arguing that the invading Aryans destroyed it all. It is clear that his arguments reflect the politics of the moment. Jigyasu was not simply writing history, he was framing a political project. Dalits in contemporary India felt they had been oppressed, exploited, ruled, and deprived for many centuries. Ultimately, if the Hindus could claim that they were descendants of the Aryans, there was no reason Jigyasu and the Adi-Hindu movement couldn't similarly claim the *dasas, asurs,* and *daityas* as their ancestors. Like all histories, claims to both Aryan and non-Aryan ancestry were constructed in relation to present-day politics.

The history of Adi-Hindus did not appear in a vacuum; instead Jigyasu's narrative reflects a political view widely shared among Chamars and Dalits in Uttar Pradesh in 1937, when his book was published. According to Mangal Jatav, the Adi-Hindu movement was launched by Swami Achhutanand in Etawah in December 1923 at a meeting attended by twenty thousand Dalits and presided over by Ramdayal Jatav, a contractor of quarries who also provided the necessary funds.[156] At this meeting, Achhutanand 'declared that the

present-day "untouchables" were the original stock of India, and Hindus and Muslims were the upstarts.'[157] He asked the government to employ Dalits in the army and police force and to provide them with facilities to become members of the *panchayats*. He urged Dalits to protest against the continued practice of *begari* in the countryside.[158] In another meeting, at Kanpur, Achhutanand declared that the *shuddhi* movement had been launched to continue the slavery of Dalits.[159] In Allahabad he appealed to all Dalits to unite with the lower castes in their struggle to challenge the dominance of caste Hindus.[160] He asserted that Dalits did not need the Hindus, their Vedas, or their gods, like Ram and Krishna. Dalits had their own tradition, based on saints like Raidas and Kabir.[161] He reminded Dalits that many Hindus ate meat but wanted Dalits to give it up: 'Why should we give it up?' He claimed that their oppression was religious and that the Dalit struggle was also directed against the Hindu religion.[162]

Swami Achhutanand demanded separate representation for Dalits within the representative bodies, like that of Sikhs. Indeed, the Sikhs were increasingly taken as a model, since they had successfully separated themselves from the claims of Hindus.[163] In a meeting at Allahabad in April 1926 he proposed that Dalits be properly represented in legislative councils and local bodies, like the boards of municipalities, towns, and districts.[164] Two months later, at a meeting in Kanpur, he went a step further and asserted that British rule meant liberation of the 'untouchables' from Hindu hegemony—a point already made by many Chamar groups in their protests. Explaining this position to the audience, he claimed that 'we are really indebted to the British government for opening to us the doors of knowledge that have been purposely, with selfish motives, banged shut against us.' According to Achhutanand, the Congress *swaraj* meant the continued subordination of the Dalits.[165]

By November 1927 an All-India Adi-Hindu Mahasabha had been established and was organizing annual conferences. The first was organized by Swami Achhutanand in November 1927 at Farrukhabad

and was presided over by a Chamar. A month later, on 27 December, a massive All-India Adi-Hindu Conference was held at Mayo Hall in Allahabad.[166] By this time, three features had come to define the second phase in Dalit politics: first, the claim that *achhuts* were the original inhabitants of India; second, the rejection of reforms within the Hindu religion; and third, the demand that the British government recognize Dalits' separate political rights. In an open letter to Gandhi in October 1928 the Adi-Hindu Mahasabha demanded separate representation in the councils and elected bodies. It also criticized as undemocratic the 1927 Nehru Report, which had outlined a constitutional scheme for communities in India, because it did not provide separate constitutional provisions to the minorities.[167] By 1929 the activities of the Adi-Hindu organization had spread to the districts of Fatehpur, Etah, Kanpur, Etawah, Agra, Meerut, Dehradun, Benares, Saharanpur, and Basti.[168] Chamar organizations also continued to raise agrarian concerns, including *begari* and the cesses imposed by the zamindars.

Chamar groups and organizations were becoming disillusioned with and critical of the activities of the Arya Samaj, especially the *shuddhi* programme. In May 1924, Sita Ram Pradhan, a member of the Raidass Kureel Sudhar Sabha of Kanpur, asserted that Hindu efforts to gain Dalits access to temples were actually part of a general effort by them to humiliate Dalits, by convincing Dalits to come to their temples and then closing the doors to them when they arrived.[169] At a massive Chamar meeting in May 1924 in Gorakhpur district, the speakers discussed the differences between themselves and the Hindu community and elaborated on the limitations of reforms within the Hindu religion. Even more importantly, Buddhist literature was distributed in the meeting.[170] In a conference attended by two thousand Chamars in April 1927 in Agra, the Jatav Sabha declared that like Sikhs, Chamars and 'untouchables' were a separate community from Hindus.[171] In Etawah in May 1927 a group of twenty-five Chamars, along with Khatiks and Dhanuks, declared that they were Adi-Hindus rather than Hindus and appealed to Dalits to boycott

performances of the Ramlila and other Hindu rites and rituals.[172] In March 1928 the Arya Samaj's annual *achhutuddhar* week evoked a very poor response from Chamars.[173] All of these show Chamars becoming increasingly uncomfortable with reform within the confines of Hindu religion.

Ganesh Vidyarthi, who first noted and welcomed the Adi-Hindu movement in 1925, in 1928 criticized the movement's leaders, saying that they were unnecessarily creating divisions within Hindu society by cooperating with the imperialist forces promoted by the British government in India.[174] He proclaimed that 'we have faith in our *crores* of *achhut* brothers who will not be deceived by such leaders, neither can they be separated from the body of Hindu society'. Once Hindu society has opened its door to Dalits, such leaders, 'who are fanning the fire of hatred, will disappear like a bad dream'.[175] The Hindi newspaper *Abhyudaya* similarly emphasized the divisive role of the British by pointing out the presence of police constables and government officials at meetings of the Adi-Hindu movement.[176] The May 1928 edition of the Hindi monthly *Chand* stated that leaders of the Adi-Hindu movement had brought disgrace to all Indians by welcoming the Simon Commission and had earned the gratitude of the British government by pleading like beggars for favours and jobs. It concluded that Dalits had sold their independence to the British.[177]

Notes

Chapter 1

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[1.] Unless otherwise specified, the term India refers to the pre-Partition territories of the Indian subcontinent.

[2.] Sir George Campbell, *Modern India* (London, 1852), p. 65; PJ. Thomas and K.C. Ramakrishnan, eds, *Some South Indian Villages: A Resurvey*, Madras University Economic Series, no. 4 (Madras, 1940), p. 347; J.C. Jack, *Economic Life of a Bengal District* (Oxford, 1916), p. 84; *Census of Punjab* (Lahore, 1870), table IV, *Census of Madras* (1871), p. 117; Jamshedji Fariudinji, *Notes on the Agriculturist of the District of Aurangabad* (Bombay, 1881).

[3.] Sir Henry Maine, *Village Communities in the East and West* (London, 1876), p. 24.

[4.] *Census of India* (1931), vol. I, pt I, pp. 288–9. It is to be regretted that the Government of India has decided not to make available the results of the 1941 census enumeration of occupational distribution. It should be noted here that due to numerous changes in classification the Indian census returns have 'lost a great deal of usefulness for comparative purposes.' B.G. Ghate, *Changes in the Occupational Distribution of the Population* (New Delhi, 1940), p. 39. On account of changes between 1911 and 1921, it is impossible to compare the *absolute numbers*; however, a *rough* comparison of the *relative proportions* of each group within the total agricultural population is not precluded thereby.

[5.] Royal Commission on Agriculture, *Report* (London, 1928), p. 12.

6. There is a fairly extensive body of literature in the form of books and articles on village studies. Only a few of them are cited below. For the Southern Triangle, see M.B. Desai, *The Rural Economy of Gujarat* (Bombay, 1948), pp. 22–3; J.B. Shukla, *Life and Labour in a Gujarat Taluka* (Bombay, 1937), pp. 81, 114; V.G. Ranade, *A Social and Economic Survey of a Konkan Village* (Bombay, 1927), p. 83. For the Eastern Region, see *Report of the Bengal Land Revenue Commission,* (1938), II, 117: *Census of India 1941* (for Bengal), vol. IV, p. 121; *Report of the Famine Enquiry Commission* (1945), app. 1, pp. 201–2, and an article by A. Ghosh in the *Indian Journal of Economics,* January 1948; also *Sankhya,* vol. VIII, pt 4 (1946). For the Great North see the various surveys by the Punjab Board of Economic Inquiry; J.L. Raina, *The Indian Rustic* (Lahore, 1935), pp. 41–52; Gopal Advani, *Etude sur la Vie Rurale dans le Sind (Inde)* (Montpellier, 1926), p. 45.

7. H. Baden-Powell, *The Indian Village Community* (London, 1896).

8. Ibid., p. 8.

9. Abhaya Charan Das, *The Indian Ryot, Land Tax, Permanent Settlement and the Famine* (Calcutta, 1881), pp. 13ff., 24.

10. M. Kovalevsky, *Communal Landholding: The Causes, Course and the Results of its Disintegration* (Moscow, 1879), pp. 161ff. (emphasis mine). It is to be regretted that this scholarly work has not been translated in any other languages. His chapter VII on 'British Agrarian Policy in East India and Its Effect on the Disintegration of Communal Landholding among the Indians' is still one of the best accounts which shows in bold relief the role of British land policies in India.

11. For other statements to the effect that landlords were created as supporting pillars of British rule in India, see A.B. Keith (ed.), *Speeches and Documents on India Policy* (Oxford, 1922), vol. I, pp. 159, 215; also Kovalevsky, op.cit., p. 162.

12. Baden-Powell, *The Land System of British India* (London, 1892), vol. III, pp. 128ff., 269, 403, 498.

13. Baden-Powell, *The Indian Village Community,* p. 429.

14. D.R. Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution of India* (London, 1929), pp. 171–4; also *Census of India* (1911), vol. I, pt I, p. 408; *Report of the Indian Central Banking*

Enquiry Committee (1931), p. 43.

15. Famine Enquiry Commission (1945), *Final Report,* p. 81; also *Census of India* (1911), vol. I, pt I, p. 429.

16. S.S. Thorburn, *Musalmans and the Moneylenders in the Punjab* (London, 1884), pp. 48–50.

17. Chapman, in his Notes to the Draft Prospectus of the Great Indian Railway in October 1844; cited by D. Thorner, *Investment in Empire* (Philadelphia, 1951), ch. I, p. 9.

18. *Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture*, p. 9; R.D. Choksey, *Economic History of the Bombay, Deccan and Karnatak* (Poona, 1945), p. 187; Baden-Powell, *The Indian Village Community*, p. 424.

19. Choksey, ibid., p. 187; Thorburn, op. cit., pp. 58ff.

20. R.C. Dutta, *Famines and Land Assessments in India* (London, 1900), p. 1.

21. Vera Anstey, *Modern India and the West* (London, 1941), p. 290.

22. *Report of the Indian Famine Commission (1901),* p. 107. Emphasis mine.

23. Ibid., p. 108.

24. Sir M.B. Nanavati and J.J. Anjaria, *The Indian Rural Problem* (Bombay, 1942), p. 32.

25. *Report of the Deccan Riots Commission (1876),* paras 70, 77.

26. *Report of the Indian Famine Commission (1901),* p. 108.

27. Cited by R.C. Dutt, *Famine and Land Assessments,* app., p. 213.

28. Nanavati and Anjaria, op.cit., p. 24.

29. S. Kesava Iyengar, *Economic Investigations in the Hyderabad State*, 5 vols (Hyderabad, 1931–2), vol. I, pt vi, p. 19; Royal Commission on Agriculture, *Minutes of Evidence,* vol. I, pt III, p. 74; Hari Har Dayal, in *Fields and Farmers in*

Oudh, ed. R.K. Mukerjee (Calcutta, 1929), p. 232; P. Pillai, *Economic Conditions in India* (London, 1925), p. 122; Nanavati and Anjaria, op.cit., p. 203.

30. *Report of the Indian Famine Commission (1901),* p. 108ff.

31. A few of them might be mentioned here. The Santhal Rebellion of 1854; the massive support, especially from the UP peasantry, given to the 1857 rebellion, the Indigo rebellion in 1860; Deccan rebellion of 1874; twenty-two Mopillah rebellions between 1836 and 1854 and five others between 1873 and 1880; Rampa rebellion on the Godawari Hills in 1835 and later in 1879; Khond rebellion in Ganjam in 1835; Pabna and Bogra outbreaks in Bengal in 1871. *Cambridge History of India,* vol. VI, pp. 38, 249, 268.

32. *Census of India (1911),* vol. I, pt I, 413.

33. Nanavati and Anjaria, op.cit., p. 14.

34. For a discussion relating to these difficulties, see *Census of India* (1931), vol. I, pt I, app. I; also, J.H. Hutton, *Caste in India: Nature, Function and Origin* (Cambridge, 1946), pp. 167ff.

35. Baden-Powell, *The Origin and Growth of Village Communities,* p. 142; also Sir H.S. Maine, *Village Communities,* p. 153.

36. Baden-Powell, op.cit., p. 58.

37. *Report of the Bengal Land Revenue Commission* (1938) mentions that nearly one and a quarter crore of rupees were obtained by Punjabis in the form of military pensions alone: p. 93.

38. PA. Wadia and K.T. Merchant, *Our Economic Problem* (Bombay, 1945), pp. 253ff; Nanavati and Anjaria, *The Indian Rural Problem,* p. 15; also A.M. Lorenzo, *Agricultural Labour Conditions in Northern India* (Bombay, 1947), pt II, pp. 55–93. These labourers are known in different parts of India by a number of names such as *hali, izlva, cheruma, puleya, hollva, padiyal, pannial, panthiram, gassigulla, bhagela, sanwak, harawah, jeetha, barasalia, kamiya, janour, gothi, naga muliya, etc.*

39. *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India* (London, 1931), p. 362.

40. Baden-Powell, *The Indian Village Community,* pp. 16ff.

41. If, as in most cases, the advance of money was for marriage, it does not show that marriage was the *cause* of accepting such bondage. In fact, marriage serves merely to emphasize the dividing line in the life of the labourer between his dependence on his parents and his seeking subsistence on his own. For a similar system in China under which, instead of an advance of money, a 'slave' girl was used by the master, see Institute of Pacific Relations, *Agrarian China* (Chicago, 1938), p. 83.

42. Thomas and Ramakrishnan, eds, op.cit., p. 351.

43. Ibid., pp. 421, 261; also Royal Commission on Agriculture, *Report,* p. 362 and *Minutes of Evidence taken in the Madras Presidency,* vol. III, p. 341; G. Mukhtyar, *Life and Labour in a South Gujarat Village* (Bombay, 1930), p. 161; Lakshman Prasad Sinha, *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics,* vol. III-I, p. 40; also p. 23.

44. It should be noted here that most authors have attributed the survival of the bonded labour system to a greater concentration of depressed and aboriginal class. Radhakamal Mukerjee, *Land Problems of India* (London, 1933), p. 226; Wadia and Merchant, op.cit., p. 253. This, however, is an oversimplification.

45. *Census of India (1921),* vol. I, pt II, p. 211.

46. *Census of India (1901),* vol. I, pt I, p. 205. For a similar position of dwarf-holding labourers in China, see the article by Sun Hsiao-isun in Institute of Pacific Relations, *Agrarian China,* p. 71.

47. *Report,* p. 582. Also see Madras Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, *Report (1930),* pp. 14ff; *Census of India (1931),* vol. VII, pt I, 195; also Hari Har Dayal, in *Fields and Farmers in Oudh,* pp. 267, 281.

48. Bengal Land Revenue Commission, *Report (1938),* pp. 67ff.

49. *The Cambridge History of India,* vol. VI, p. 30.

50. *Report (1930),* vol. I, p. 340.

51. Royal Commission on Agriculture, *Report*, p. 433. Emphasis mine.

52. Ramakrishna Mukerjee, 'Economic Structure of Rural Bengal: A Survey of Six Villages', *American Sociological Review,* December 1948, p. 664; also *Sankhya* (1946), vol. VII, pt III.

53. *Report*, p. 133.

54. Famine Enquiry Commission, *Report on Bengal* (1945), pp. 6ff; app. I.

55. Dr V.K.R.V. Rao estimated that in provinces other than Bombay, more than 60 per cent of the cultivators appear to own less than five acres each. *National Income of British India* (London, 1941), p. 190.

56. *Report of the Bengal Land Revenue Commission,* pp. 50, 84.

57. Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha, *Memorandum to the Bengal Land Revenue Commission,* pp. 42ff.

58. Ambica Ghosh, 'Agricultural Labourers in Bengal', *The Indian Journal of Economics,* January 1948, p. 438.

59. Nanavati and Anjaria, *The Indian Rural Problem*, p. 41.

60. *Report of the Bengal Land Revenue Commission,* vol. I, p. 92; vol. II, app., VII, pp. 39–40.

61. *Census of India (1931),* vol. XIII, pt I, pp. 434–7.

62. Thomas and Ramakrishna, eds, *Some South India Villages*, p. 421.

63. *Report,* p. 576.

64. Ibid., Minutes of Evidence, vol. IV, p. 12, also *Census of India (1911),* vol. V, pt I, p. 536.

65. Royal Commission on Agriculture, *Minutes of Evidence,* vol. III, pp. 315–16; also *Report,* pp. 576–7.

66. *Census of India (1931),* vol. XVIII, pt I, p. 50; also *Indian Journal of Agricultural Ecomomics,* April 1948, pp. 24, 48.

67. W. Nassau Less, *The Land and Labour of India: A Resurvey* (London, 1867), pp. 203–5.

68. General Council of the Trade Union Congress of Great Britain, *Report on Labour Conditions in India* (London, 1928), p. 183.

69. *Report* (New Delhi, 1946), p. 183.

70. Ibid., pp. 184–7.

71. R.P. Dutt, *India To-day* (Bombay, 1949).

72. *Report,* p. 194.

73. Ibid., p. 182.

74. M.B. Desai, *Rural Economy of Gujarat* (Oxford, 1948), p. 154. He concluded: 'There is no tendency toward capitalistic farming in Gujarat', pp. 151ff.

75. Thomas and Ramakrishnan, eds, op.cit., p. 349.

76. Ambica Ghosh, *Indian Journal of Economics,* January 1948, p. 432.

77. It is illuminating to note here the brilliant remarks made by R.H. Tawney in 1938 in connection with a not altogether dissimilar context in China. He wrote: 'The improvement of agricultural methods is, no doubt, indispensable; but it is idle to preach that doctrine to cultivators so impoverished by the exactions of parasitic interests that they do not possess the resources needed to apply it. In the Europe of the nineteenth century, the reconstruction of the legal fabric of the land system preceded the modernization both of productive technique and the business side of farming; nor, in the absence of the former, would the two last have been possible. China, it may be prophesied, will find it necessary to follow the same sequence of stages. Land-tenure will require to be reformed and the stranglehold of the usurer and middlemen to be broken before much can be expected in the way of technical progress . . . To carry through such a policy will demand, not only knowledge, but a stout heart and a firm hand; but it would open the door to a new era of Chinese history.' To this, he added his now prophetic warning: 'A government which permits the exploitation of the mass of its fellow-citizens on the scale depicted in the pages which follow may make a brave show,

but it is digging its own grave. A government which grapples boldly with the land-question will have little to fear either from foreign imperialism or from domestic disorder. It will have as its ally the confidence and good will of half-a- million villages.' Institute of Pacific Relations, *Agrarian China* (Chicago, 1938).

Chapter 2

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1. Ministry of Labour, *Reports on the Second Agricultural Labour Enquiry, 1956–57* (New Delhi, 1960). An agricultural labour household is defined as one where the bulk of income in the previous year was derived from agricultural wages. Such households formed 24.7 per cent of the *total* rural households. In 1951 the agricultural population was 82 per cent of the rural population.

2. Differences in definition may exaggerate the growth of landless labour, but the fact of this growth is undeniable.

3. See, e.g., R. Mukherjee, *The Dynamics of a Rural Society* (Berlin, 1957); A.R. Desai, ed., *The Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (Bombay, 1948); R. Palme Dutt, *India Today,* 2nd Indian edn (Bombay, 1949); S.J. Patel, *Agricultural Labourers in Modern India and Pakistan* (Bombay, 1952); Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India,* vol. 1 (New Delhi, 1960).

4. Patel, op.cit., pp. 32, 63.

5. See, e.g., K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Colonialism* (Moscow, n.d.), pp. 35–7, 271.

6. Work on this census extended from 1867 to 1872, and it was published in 1871–2. It will be referred to here as the 1871 census.

7. This was known as the *inamdari* system.

8. For a detailed account of South Indian land tenures, see B.H. Baden- Powell, *Land Systems of British India* (1892), vol. III; see also S. Sundaraja Iyengar, *Land Tenures in Madras Presidency* (Madras, 1916).

9. In 1799 a landowner in Chinglepet had 400 slaves; but he could employ only 100 of them, and the remainder worked for other landholders; see Place, *Report on the Jaghir* (Madras, n.d.), written in 1799, p. 75. In 1835–6 it was reported that a landholder in Tinnevelly had 500 slaves, but apparently he also let them work for others, for want of sufficient land; *Report of Indian Law Commissioners on Slavery* (1841), p. 20, (hereafter *Slavery Report).*

10. This prohibition was not uniformly rigid. The Haiga Brahmins of South Kanara were reported to do every kind of manual labour on their own lands. But this was exceptional in certain parts of Malabar; on the other hand, Brahmins might not even supervise labour.

11. Domestic slavery did exist in South India at this time, particularly among the Muslims. But it was not widespread. Moreover, it has little bearing on our problems. Since domestic servants could not be untouchable, they had to come from a completely different social group from the agricultural labourers.

12. For an example of the rights of the pariah, see E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, 7 vols (Madras, 1909).

13. The main sources of information about servitude in the various regions are replies sent by the revenue and judicial officials to enquiries about the nature and extent of slavery and serfdom in their districts. There were two such enquiries, one in 1819, the other in 1836. The results are summarized in *Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, no. 125: Slavery in India: Correspondence and Abstracts of Regulations and Proceedings from 1777* (hereafter referred to as *Slavery in India, 1828), P.P. 1837–38, House of Commons, no. 697. Slave Trade: Correspondence, Orders and Regulations, and Proceedings Taken Thereon, 1829–38* (hereafter referred to as *Slavery in India, 1838), P.P. 1841* (XXVIII). *Reports of the Indian Law Commissioners on Slavery* (hereafter, *Report on Slavery, 1841*). Another source is the manuscript Proceedings of the Madras Board of Revenue, which is preserved in the Madras Record Office, (hereafter referred to as P.B.R.).

14. F. Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar,* 2nd edn (Madras, 1870), II, p. 67.

15. The Malayalam word for slave is *adima.* Cheruman is merely one of the groups included in this generic term. But it was commonly used by the British as

synonymous with all agricultural slaves or serfs, whatever their castes. Buchanan is not only confused about the difference between cheruman and adima, but also about the difference between two quite separate labour castes, cheruman and puliyan: 'In some parts of the province *cherumar* (*cheruman*) is a term applied to slave in general, whatever their caste may be; but it is in other parts confined to a peculiar caste, who are also called *polian*. Even among these wretched creatures, the pride of caste has full influence, and if a *cherumar* or *pallan* be touched by a slave of the *Parian* tribe he is defiled, and must wash his head and pray': op.cit., Buchanan, II, p. 151.

16. Ibid., II, pp. 67–8.

17. Graeme, Report on Malabar, 14 January 1822, para. 34 *(Slavery in India, 1828,* pp. 914–15). The rates of interest etc. for each of these forms of mortgage are also given.

18. Baden-Powell, III, p. 153.

19. Buchanan, II, p. 67; Report on Malabar, para. 33. Buchanan adds that the only restriction of the master's powers of sale were that husband and wife might not be sold separately. The children belonged to the master of one of the parents, depending on the marriage customs of the caste.

20. Magistrate, North Malabar, to Government, 31 March 1812; *Slavery in India, 1828,* p. 567. Graeme says that a slave might be sold in another *taluk* (a subdivision of a district) but it had to be contiguous with his own; Report on Malabar, para. 33.

21. Ibid., para. 1130. With *painer cf.* the Tamil caste name *pannaiyal.*

22. Buchanan, II, pp. 68, 154.

23. *PP 1831–2, Report from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company,* Appendix K, p. 558 (hereafter *Select Committee Report, 1832).*

24. Collector, Malabar, to Board of Revenue, 20 July 1819 *(Slavery in India, 1828),* p. 846.

25. *Cf.* the Malayalam term *pulaiyan.*

26. *Morgru* is the name of the fisherman caste in Kanara; Sir Athelstane Eaines, *Ethnography (Castes and Tribes)* (Strasburg, 1912).

27. *Mari* and *mera* are subdivisions of the *holeya* caste; E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (7 vols, Madras, 1909), II, p. 329.

28. *Mundala* or *bakuda* is another subdivision of the *holeya,* idem.

29. This account has been compiled from Collector, South Kanara, to Board of Revenue, P.B.R., 3 August 1801: and from his letter on 7 August 1801, quoted in *Slavery Papers, 1828,* pp. 549–50.

30. *Census Report for Mysore* (1901), quoted in Thurston, II, p. 335.

31. Collector, South Kanara, to Board of Revenue, 10 July 1819; *Slavery Papers, 1828*, p. 843.

32. *Report on Slavery, 1841,* p. 147.

33. Baden-Powell, III, pp. 111–12; W.H. Bayley and W. Hudleston, *Papers on Mirasi Right* (Madras, 1892), p. 335.

34. *Pannai,* a farm; *padi,* a fixed daily allowance of food; *al,* a labourer.

35. Collector, Tinnevelly, to Board of Revenue, 30 June 1819; *Slavery Papers, 1828,* p. 841; P.B.R., 25 November 1819; Collector, Coimbatore, to Board of Revenue, P.B.R., 24 January 1819.

36. Collector, Trichinopoly, to Board of Revenue, 1 July 1819, Trichinopoly Records, vol. 3677, p. 153.

37. The correct Tamil word for 'slave' is *adimai.* It may well be that the word was originally used of those who could be transferred separately from the land (although the *Tamil Lexicon* defines *adimai* as 'a slave formerly attached to the land and transferable with it), while pannaiyal was used of those permanently attached to the land. But if there had ever been such a distinction, by the nineteenth century it had become blurred.

38. Collector, Coimbatore, to Board of Revenue, 24 June 1819, *Slavery Papers, 1828,* pp. 836–7.

39. Collector, Trichinopoly, to Board of Revenue, 1 July 1819, ibid., p. 839; Reply of Magistrate, Trichinopoly, 5 January 1836, *Report on Slavery, 1841*, p. 460.

40. Collector, Tinnevelly, to Board of Revenue, 30 June 1819, Tinnevelly Records, vol. 3596, pp. 331–3; Replies of Assistant Judge, 15 May 1836, and Joint Magistrate, 21 December 1835, *Report on Slavery, 1841*, pp. 457–60.

41. Tanjore Records, vol. 3284, pp. 73–6; Reply of Judge, Kumbakonam, 1836, *Report on Slavery, 1841,* p. 461.

42. Reply of Judge, 30 April 1836, ibid., pp. 455–7.

43. Collector, Chinglepet, to Board of Revenue, 1819, Chinglepet Records, vol. 467, p. 112, *Report on Slavery, 1841,* Appendix IX.

44. *Papers on Mirasi Right*, pp. 334–6.

45. *Slavery Papers, 1828,* pp. 871–2.

46. Buchanan, I, pp. 441–2.

47. Chinglepet Records, vol. 467, p. 111.

48. Place, para. 75.

49. Replies of judicial officers in Telugu districts, *Report on Slavery, 1841.* Appendix IX, pp. 445–6.

50. In the northern districts slaves were certainly being bought for export. This was mentioned in a warning proclamation by the Governor-General, 8 March 1819, Godavari Records, vol. 918, pp. 15–18.

51. Minute of Board of Revenue, 5 January 1818, para. 13, *Selections from Papers from the Records at the East-India House* (London, 1820), I, p. 887.

52. Collector to Board of Revenue, 29 March 1819, pp. 1831–2, Appendix LXXXIS, pp. 511–12.

53. *Report on Slavery, 1841,* IX, p. 444.

54. Ibid., pp. 444–6.

55. Ibid., p. 115.

56. Agricultural servitude was obviously deep-rooted in South Indian society. The complex dealings in human beings that Buchanan saw in 1800 must have developed over a long period of time. There are also references to servitude in temple inscriptions and in the accounts of early foreign travellers. For a description of early forms of agricultural labour, including types of 'serfdom', in the Cola period *(flor,* first to thirteenth centuries A.D.) in the Tamil areas, see K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas* (Madras, 1955), pp. 567–70. For Malabar, see reference in K.P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala* (Ernakulam, 1924), and in Barbosa Duarte, *A Description of the Goasis of East Africa and Malabar* (London, 1866).

57. Agricultural labourers could of course also have been drawn from other castes. This point is dealt with later.

58. Op. cit., II, p. 198. The total population has been calculated on the assumption of 5 people per house, as in Palghat.

59. Ibid., II, p. 146.

60. Ibid., II, p. 162.

61. Ibid., II, p. 117.

62. Collector, Malabar, to Board of Revenue, 20 July 1819, *Slavery Papers, 1828,* p. 845.

63. According to H. Bevan, a military officer, there were 100,000 slaves in Wynaad in 1832, but his evidence is probably not as reliable as that of the administrators. *Select Committee Report, 1832,* Appendix K, p. 577.

64. All figures from T.B. Baber's evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Commons of 1832. Mr Baber had served for 32 years in Bombay, Malabar and Kanara.

65. This was disputed by Mr Brown, manager of a plantation, who held that this figure related to caste and not actual occupation, and included men who cultivated their own land. He also said that the correct census figure was 146,202. *Report on Slavery, 1841,* p. 127.

66. W. Logan, *Manual of the Malabar District* (1906), I, p. 151.

67. Principal Collector of Malabar, to Board of Revenue, 24 April 1838, quoted in *Parliamentary Papers Regarding Slavery in the East Indies*, 6 April 1841, p. 93.

68. North Kanara was separated from South Kanara and added to Bombay Presidency in 1861 but unless otherwise noted, Kanara stands for South Kanara in this article.

69. Buchanan, II, pp. 203–4.

70. They were described by the Magistrate of Kanara in 1819 as descendants of persons taken in battle, or Brahmin women who had lost caste. *Slavery Report, 1841,* Appendix IX.

71. The population of South Kanara in 1800–1 was 396,672; the population of the whole of Kanara in 1807 was 576,640 and 665,652 in 1827.

72. Unless otherwise stated, all the figures in this paragraph are from the *Report on Slavery, 1841.*

73. Collector, South Arcot, to Board of Revenue, 12 September 1819, *Slavery Papers, 1828,* p. 871.

74. Evidence of A.D. Campbell, *Select Committee Report, 1832,* Appendix K. The population of Tanjore in 1831 was 1,128,730, P.B.R., 4 March 1833.

75. The number of pallan, etc., was 129,520; the population of Tinnevelly in 1822–3 was 788,196, P.B.R., 3 November 1823.

76. Collector, Trichinopoly, to Board to Revenue, 1 July 1819. Trichinopoly Records, vol. 3677, p. 152.

77. The caste breakdown is very rough: into 'Brahmins, Muslims, Soodras, etc.' and 'Pallars, Pariahs, etc.', P.B.R., 21 February 1831.

78. Caste figures are also available for Guntur for 1830, but since the breakdown is into 'Brahmins, Muslims, Soondars, Pariah', etc., they cannot be used. *PB.R., 24 January 1831.*

79. P.B.R., 18 November 1830.

80. The Magistrate of South Arcot wrote on 28 February 1836, that agricultural slavery was considerable in his districts, particularly in the two southern *taluks* bordering Tanjore. *Report on Slavery, 1841*, pp. 450–1.

81. See *Slavery Papers, 1828,* pp. 836–7, and *Report on Slavery, 1841,* p. 461.

82. *Slavery Papers, 1828,* pp. 873–4.

83. Ibid., pp. 336–7.

84. Collector, Madura, to Board of Revenue, 26 October 1819, Madura Records, vol. 1166, pp. 91–3.

85. For the Telugu districts no figures of caste or occupation are available for this period. Even in the twentieth century the depressed castes of Andhra were socially much better off than those on the west coast or in Tamilnad. See J.H. Hutton, *Caste in India*, 2nd edn, p. 205.

86. There are many references to show that agricultural 'slaves' or 'serfs' could be drawn only from the agricultural labour castes.

87. The following extract from the *1921 Census Report* illustrates the difficulties of defining caste: 'In the Census Report of 1911 caste was defined as an "endogamous group or collection of groups bearing a common name and having a common traditional occupation, who are so linked together by these and other ties, such as the tradition of a common origin, the possession of the same tutelary deity, and the same social status, ceremonial observations and family priests, that they regard themselves and are regarded by others, as forming a single homogenous community." As a rule a caste contains several endogamous groups or sub-castes. It is held by some authorities that each of these groups ought to be regarded as a caste, that the large body commonly called a caste is merely a collection of true castes who follow the same profession. Be that as it may, the man in the street applies the term caste to the larger group, and this report adopts the same practice. The characteristics of a caste will then be endogamy, commensality, and a common name and common tradition, though intermarriage and commensality seldom extended to the whole caste and are generally restricted to sub-castes or

endogamous groups within the caste. The common name is not always a safe guide nor is the common traditional occupation.' *1901 Census Report,* pp. 153–4. Unless otherwise mentioned, references are to the Madras Census Reports.

88. *Census Report, 1901,* pp. 172–3.

89. *Census Report, 1891,* p. 245.

90. This type of error arose from the fact that each depressed caste would have its own functionaries, for caste reasons again. Thus 'each depressed caste (has) its own priests, medicine men, bands, acrobats and orderlies. But in relation to the other castes the general body of depressed caste and its accessory functionaries form a unit having the same status and subject to the same social distance.' N.S. Reddy, 'Transition in Caste Structure in Andhra Desh with Particular Reference to Depressed Classes', unpublished dissertation (1952), pp. 16–17.

91. Thus *pulaiyan* is a synonym for *cheruman* as well as the name of a Tamil caste of hill cultivators found in Madura and Coimbatore, *Census Report, 1901,* p. 175. *Panchama* is also a synonym for *mala* or *paraiyan*; in 1891 in the Tamil districts the *panchama* were included in the *pariah*, but in the Telugu districts were registered as a separate caste. *Census Report, 1891,* p. 249.

92. *Census Report, 1901,* p. 127.

93. For example, of these and other types of caste formation, see *Census Report, 1901,* p. 132.

94. Also, entire castes or sub-castes could change their names; and it was naturally the lowest castes which actually did so. But the old despised caste names were forsaken for new and (temporarily) more respectable ones on a large scale only in the twentieth century; and in fact this made a significant difference to the census figures only in 1931. In fact 'the experience of seven censuses in this State confirms the view that the caste return is one of the most accurate of all the census tables, and is far more reliable than age statistics for instance, or the return of infirmities or occupation'. *Census Reports, 1931,* vol. 9 (Baroda), p. 393.

95. *Slavery Papers, 1828,* p. 837.

96. Bayley and Hudleston, p. 335.

97. *Census Report, 1881,* p. 110. See also *Census Report, 1891,* p. 246; and *Salem Gazetteer,* pt I, p. 142.

98. *Slavery Papers, 1828,* p. 871. On phonetic grounds, *pulley* should mean *palli*, but from conditions in other districts *pallan* is more likely.

99. *Census Report, 1871*, p. 158.

100. Census Report, 1911.

101. Between 1871 and 1881 the Hindu population declined by 2.27 per cent, but the proportionate decline was greater for the pariah. The decline was partly due to the effects of the 1876–8 famine, and partly due to conversion *(Census Report, 1881,* p. 115). For some districts, e.g., Malabar, the conversion would be more significant *(Census Report, 1881,* p. 115). In some years, the caste figures include converts (e.g., 1881).

102. *Census Report, 1891,* p. 246.

103. Ibid., p. 245.

104. *Census Report, 1871,* p. 289.

105. Ibid., p. 252.

106. Indeed, those who hold that the class was created during the nineteenth century could find support in the fact that castes with traditional occupations, such as the *madiga,* or leather-workers, of Andhra as well as the *chakkiliyan,* or Tamil leather-workers, were also for the most part agricultural labourers in 1901. It is when deciding the significance of such date that the contemporary evidence about the existence of slavery is most useful.

107. Collector, Salem, to Board of Revenue, 14 June 1819, *Slavery Papers, 1828,* p. 836. In Ramnad also the pallan were 'employed exclusively in the cultivation of paddy lands'. *Ramnad Manual,* pp. 36–7.

108. It is unnecessary to repeat the statements of every official who wrote on the question that the 'slaves' could be drawn only from certain castes. The only contradictory statement was made by the Collector of North Arcot on 23

December 1819: 'The slaves, though universally I believe *pariahs* (by which he meant untouchables) cannot be said to be of any particular caste', which, he added, distinguished them from the slaves in Malabar: *Slavery Papers, 1928,* pp. 873–4. But all the weight of the evidence is against him, unless perhaps he was referring to debt slavery.

109. Collector, Malabar, to Board of Revenue, 20 July 1819: *Slavery Papers, 1828*, p. 846.

110. PBR, 3 August 1801.

111. PBR, 11 January 1844.

112. Buchanan, II, p. 198.

113. Collector, Malabar, to Board of Revenue, 20 July 1819; *Slavery Papers, 1828*, p. 846.

114. Between 1871 and 1901, the proportion of male agricultural labourers to the male working force varied from 16 to 18 per cent; at the beginning of the nineteenth century, according to our calculations, the agricultural labour groups formed from 10 to 15 per cent of the total population.

Chapter 3

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1. Surendra J. Patel, *Agricultural Labourers in Modern India and Pakistan,* Bombay, 1952; also his *Essays in Economic Transition,* New York, 1965, pp. 3–32.

2. Patel, *Agricultural Labourers*, p. 9.

3. J. Krishnamurty, 'The Industrial Distribution of the Working Force in India, 1901–1961—A Study of Selected Aspects', Ph.D thesis (unpublished), Delhi

University, 1971, ch. II, esp. p. 52. Evidence for 1961 suggests that about 20 per cent of the unspecified were in urban areas.

4. Patel, *Agricultural Labourers*, p. 12.

5. Patel, *Essays in Economic Transition,* pp. 3–32. See Census of India, 1961, *Paper No. 1, 1962,* Delhi, Publications Division, 1962, app. I, pp. 389–413.

6. See Alice Thorner, 'Secular Trend of the Indian Economy 1881–1961', *Economic Weekly,* July 1962, pp. 1156–65; and Krishnamurty, 'Industrial Distribution', ch. VII.

Chapter 4

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1. Correspondence between the Directors of the East India Company and the Company's Government in India on the subject of slavery. *Account and Papers,* vol. 16, session 15-11-1837–16-8-1838, pt LI, p. 433.

2. Report of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee, 1951, p. 129.

3. *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency,* 1877, pt 2, p. 198.

4. 'Some of these agricultural labourers are free to work wherever they like, but the majority of them are Hallee, either Bandhella or Chhuta', says the first survey and settlement report from 1893 of the subdistrict of Palsana, which is included in the *Revision Settlement Report Palsana Taluka,* 1911.

5. Choksey, 1968, p. 55.

6. Letter from WJ. Lumsden, Collector and Magistrate of Surat, dated 8-8-1825 and included in the correspondence referred to in n.1 above.

7. Cf. my rejection of his argumentation in ch. 1 of my book, *Patronage and Exploitation.*

8. Kosambi, 1956, p. 353.

9. Baines, 1912, p. 28.

10. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the duties of a bound farm servant in Bihar were described as follows: 'The master might employ slaves in baking, cooking, dyeing and washing clothes; as agents in mercantile transactions; in attending cattle, tillage, or cultivation; as carpenters, ironmongers, goldsmiths, weavers, shoe-makers, boatmen, twisters of silk, water-drawers, ferriers, bricklayers, and the like. He may hire them out on service in any of the above capacities; he may also employ them himself, or for the use of his family in other duties of a domestic nature, such as in fetching water for washing, anointing his body with oil, rubbing his feet, or attending his person while dressing, and in guarding the door of his house, etc. He may also have connection with his legal female slave, provided she is arrived at the age of maturity and the master has not previously given her in marriage to another.' Cited in Lorenzo, 1943, p. 61.

11. Lumsden, *op.cit.*

12. *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, 1877,* pt 2, pp. 198–200.

13. M.B. Desai, 1948, ch. 6.

14. 'At first sight, this arrangement scarcely appears an economical one to the masters, but they have assured me that, everything considered, it is financially better than keeping no farm servants, and engaging labourers whenever they are wanted. For, when any of the principal operations, such as ploughing, reaping, etc., are in full swing, the demand for labourers is often far greater than the supply and not to have sufficient hands at such seasons must mean a heavy loss.' *Papers Relating to the Revision Survey Settlement of the Bardoli Taluka, 1987, p. 7.*

15. *Revision Settlement Report Palasana Taluka*, 1911, p. 5.

16. 'I believe the slaves to be more comfortable than the free portion of their respective castes', wrote Lumsden in his letter of 1825. Half a century later this statement is unequivocally repeated: *'Halis* are still, as a rule, better off than those of their clan who are nominally free labourers.' *(Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency,* 1877, pt 2, p. 201.)

17. B.H. Mehta, 1934, p. 339.

18. 'No social degradation attaches to the position of a Hali if Men of this class intermarry with the independent labourers of their own tribe' *(Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency,* 1877, pt 2, p. 198).

19. Cf. also Harper, who describes a similar relation between landlords and agricultural labourers in Mysore: 'Indentureship was a method of binding an employer and an employee into a stable alliance which ideally persisted from generation to generation. The servant was the lifelong employee of the master, and the servant's sons and the master's sons should, if possible, continue the alliance' (Harper, 1967, p. 40).

20. 'The failure to define satisfactorily just what is rural or urban has led some social scientists erroneously to assume that because many in the upper class are large landowners, the elite are therefore largely rural. Others, however, have recognized the fundamentally urban nature of this stratum' (Sjoberg, 1965, p. 112).

21. R. Wallace, 1863, p. 468. T.B. Naik, p. 178, also underlines the prominence of the Desai in the past: 'Apart from the monetary and village grants some Desais had their own insignia: a cannon, a *phalki*, a canopy and a *chamar*, and had their own torch-bearers and attendants. Moreover they had the rights of being gifted in kind or cash by various other communities under customary rules.'

22. This appears, for instance, from *Morrisons Report* of 13-11-1812, in which the system of tax collecting is outlined. 'The zemindars (Desais and Patels) generally in the end agree to two or more persons and authorize them to settle the *juma* payable by the whole purgunnah and afterwards to distribute the amount on the different villages.'

The district officers, as they were called by the Brirish government, stood surety for each other. Each subdistrict had a number of principal Desais, but the rights were subdivided among many others. In Bulsar, for instance, there were five 'principal' Desais, but 140 'subordinate shares'. For other subdistricts, such as Chorasi, Chikhli, Parchol, Supa, similar data are given. See also n. 24, below.

23. *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency,* 1877, pt 2, p. 192. Pedder states that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Desais were regarded as zamindars and

also called themselves that (Pedder, 1865, p. 316).

24. 'Among the Desais of the Surat Athavisi there seems to have long existed, as there still exists, a jealousy of each other which would not permit any individuals to assume the position of principals or representatives of the family in watan duties; all shares were considered equal, and as the watan families increased, the members of them divided among themselves the Desais' rights in different villages of their Purguna, and indeed the Desaigari of the same village was often divided into the "khatas" (i.e., part) of two or more Desais, brothers or cousins' (Pedder, 1865, p. 316).

25. Pedder states that Bulsar, for instance, was divided into four Desai watans, but the attendant emoluments benefitted 350 separate shareholders belonging to seventeen different families, 'whose rights have mostly originated in purchase or mortgage' (Pedder, 1865, p. 313). In the principality of Baroda the office of Desai was still sold until the end of the last-century *(Baroda Enquiry Commission,* 1873–5, pt 1, p. 519).

26. Concerning this marriage system, see van der Veen, 1972, pp. 74–82.

27. See *Census of India,* 1911, pt 16, vol. 1, 282, and Naik, 1957, p. 178.

28. See the first cadastral report of Bulsar taluka from 1870, included as appendix R in *Papers Relating to the Revision Survey Settlement of the Bulsar Taluka of the Surat Collectorate,* 1900, p. 70. Cf. also the correspondence between the Collector and other government functionaries, which is included in *Papers Relating . . . Jalalpor Taluka,* 1900, pp. 84, 99. See also the autobiography of G.G. Desai, an Anavil who in the colonial bureaucracy rose to be a magistrate but was discharged with ignominy (G.G. Desai, 1906, p. 3).

29. Cited from the first cadastral report of Jalalpor taluka in 1868 and included in *Papers Relating . . . Jalalpor Taluka,* 1900, appendix R, p. 11.

30. 'With regard to the future entry of names, the Collector may guarantee to the *Watandars* that a record shall be kept in a *Watan* book to show the shares of each sharer whose name is now entered, and that this book shall be corrected from time to time by the insertion of the names of heirs in application and legal proof of heirship. But no guarantee of payment of separate small sums in the form now

paid should be given, because whether a settlement be accepted or not, this system will be superseded by one involving less labour and inconvenience in the public offices' (Pedder, *op.cit.,* p. 426). The entry and periodic addition of names was for the Desais of the greatest importance. The above quotation illustrates very clearly the failure of the British government officials to understand this passion for registration where, after all, the yearly allowances were minimal. Entry in the register, however, was a confirmation of, or a claim to, high origin.

31. 'Those who want to rise in social status can do so, especially through marriage into a higher family by paying a higher dowry and goods. Secondly, the classes as they rise in social ascendance spend more and more on marriage and other social ceremonies. Though conspicuous exhibitionism of one's status, *motia* or *mobhbho* (through a colourful decoration of the marriage booth, through invitations to singers and dancers, and through giving and displaying the costly gifts to the bridegroom), is the mark of all Anavil social classes, the tendency for showing off and spending increases as one rises (or wants to rise) in the social hierarchy (the uppermost families could afford to go in for a much less elaborate affair, not requiring much money)' (T.B. Naik, 1857, p. 179).

32. T.B. Naik, *ibid.*

33. *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency,* 1877, pt 197; Shukla, 1937, p. 124.

34. 'Halis are no longer maintained as the Anavils find it hard enough to feed themselves, let alone their Halis' *(Papers Relating . . . Chikhli Taluka).* The Census of 1901 states that during the famine of the preceding years many halis had been dismissed *(Census of India,* 1901, pt 18, vol. 1, pp. 72–3).

35. T.B. Naik, 1950, p. 33.

36. S. Mehta, 1930, p. 131.

37. Gould, 1964, p. 21.

38. T.B. Naik, 1958, p. 389.

39. Cf. Srinivas, 1966, ch. 1, par. 3.

40. As to the style of life of the elite in preindustrial towns, Sjoberg writes, 'Not only does the upper class function without engaging in physical labor, but it arrogates to itself luxury items that enable it to achieve a life style that dramatically sets it apart from the lower class; in turn this ostentisation reinforces its power and authority' (Sjoberg, 1965, pp. 118–19).

41. Writing about the production relation in Uttar Pradesh, Neale remarks, 'The superior feels that he must support those who are loyal to him, whether as family head, patron, or faction leader. If he must provide for those under him then he has no incentive to rationalize his economic operations. In effect, the followers must be paid in any case; to spread the load makes life easier and appears equitable' (Neale, 1962, p. 169). In the context of this quotation, however, the author creates the erroneous impression that in such a situation there is no question of a non-rational orientation.

42. A statement of Lorenzo concerning the kamias in Chota Nagpur, comparable to the halis in south Gujarat, also points in this direction: 'The sale of the Kamia is supposed to be derogatory. It is often the result of the landlord's uncertain economic position, which makes it difficult for him to maintain his Kamias. The Babhan mahajans (the caste of the masters) take much pride in having a greater number of Kamias, and often as a result of this race for Kamia ownership, their sale is postponed as long as possible' (Lorenzo, 1943, pp. 80–1).

43. See also Cohn, 1955, p. 65.

44. 'Occupations involving heavy physical labour are generally esteemed to be very low and direct dependence on others for one's livelihood suggests lack of freedom, which is also not a sign for a high status occupation in the village' (Joshi, 1966, p. 28).

45. Cohn represents the village as a small principality with a closed prestige and power system in the traditional community. 'Before the end of the nineteenth century, the little kingdom was an almost closed prestige system; prestige depended on the amount of land one inherited from his ancestors, the status of his family in relation to the founding ancestors, and the low caste followers that he could muster' (Cohn, 1959–60, p. 92). It is a characterization of local dominance in north India which also applied to the Anavils of south Gujarat.

46. A small anthology of statements concerning the Anavils: 'They are notoriously a quarrelsome and intriguing race, full of duplicity and chicanery, adepts in controversy, most obstinate in purpose, and extremely fond of litigation. They will dispute an usurped right, or the doubtful possession of a field or tree with a pertinacity unequalled even among the natives of India. Neither reason nor argument can convince them, and after petitioning every tribunal of appeal, I believe death alone puts an end to many of their inveterate disputes about lands' (Bellasis, 1854, p. 2).

'I would have passed over any allusion to the character of the Bhatellas, were they not a power in the community, exercising great influence over the minds of the people who are numerically stronger than themselves.' Captain Newport thus portrays them in 1822: 'My intercourse with the Bhatella Brahmins has been extensive and intimate, and as individuals I found them obsequious and servile when they expected benefit; would seldom or never answer a question direct until its object had been guessed at, and then guided by interested motives, would either evade it by pretended ignorance or by direct falsehood. Indeed experience has proved to Government that some of the most respectable are not trustworthy.'

'It rejoices me to think that both you (the Collector of Surat) and the revenue commissioner are not unacquainted with the turbulent and never-too-satisfied class of ryots in this district. Villagers who had not petitioned were threatened with excommunication, and in this manner it has been the Bhatella policy from the commencement of our rule to show as much general dissatisfaction as is possible, in the hope that per adventure their efforts may bring forth a little good' *(Papers Relating.. . Jalalpur Taluka,* appendix R, The first survey and settlement report, of 1868–9, p. 30).

'These Bhatelas are notorious as the greatest intriguers in the country: This character, assisted by the hereditary influence I have described them in (*sic*) possessing, has enabled them to worm themselves into positions of power as patels of villages, which they have used to the injury of the revenues of exacting labour from the lower castes of cultivators, and thus preventing them to improve their own condition'

(Papers Relating. . . Chikhli Taluka, p. 630). Where the authors of these reports speak of Bhathelas it appears from the context that by this term they refer to all Anavils.

47. Singh, 1947, p. 134.

48. 'From close enquiries I have made, I can say with certainty that these poor people (halis) are treated with kindness and consideration, and are looked upon as humble dependents who have great claims on their masters and their families'—is a comment from *Papers Relating . . . Chikhli Taluka,* p. 51. See also *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency,* 1883, p. 118.

49. See also Srinivas, 1955, p. 28.

50. Cf. Cohn, 1955, pp. 61– 2.

51. Fear of eviction from the house site, fear of recall of loans, fear of loss of the additional income from the piece of land gifted to him and lastly, the security taken from a farm servant in the form of deferred wages to be paid only at the harvest, are more powerful and terrible sanctions than what the ordinary law may provide' (Sivaswamy, 1948, p. 30). See also Beldelman, 1959, pp. 36–7.

52. J. Dave, translation from the Gujarat, 1946, p. 18. For a remark of similar purport, see *Report of the Hali Labour Enquiry Committee,* 1950, p. 48.

53. Kishore, 1924, p. 427.

54. Enthoven, 1920, p. 347.

55. J. Vibart, Principal Collector of Surat, in a letter dated 16-12-1835, wrote, 'By a letter from Government, dated 19th April 1822, the Magistrates are authorized to apprehend and return to his master any Halee who may abscond.' G. Grant, Acting Judge and Session Judge in Surat, expressed the same view in a letter dated 22 February 1836. This correspondence was included as Appendix to Report on Slavery in *Account and Papers,* vol. 16, session 15-11-1837—16-8-1838, pt LI; see n. 1 of this article.

56. Weber, 1962, p. 682. Concerning the past situation of agricultural labourers in the eastern regions of Germany, Weber remarks in another publication: 'Except in

times of extreme political turmoil, a class consciousness among the rural proletariat directed against the masters could only develop purely individually with relation to one master alone insofar as he falled to show the average combination of naive (*sic*) brutishness and personal kindness. That, on the other hand, the agricultural labourers were not normally exposed to the pressure of a purely commercial exploitation was in complete accordance with this. For the man opposite them was not an "entrepreneur" but a territorial lord in miniature' (Weber, 1924, p. 474).

Chapter 5

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1. *Samyavad* (Kanpur), 27 November 1938, p. 6.

2. J.T.F. Jordens, 'Medieval Hindu Devotionalism', in A.L. Basham (ed.), *A Cultural History of India* (Oxford, 1975), p. 275.

3. W Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh* (Calcutta, 1896), vol. II, pp. 184–8.

4. G.W. Briggs, writing in 1920 about the untouchable Chamars, mentioned that in the previous twenty years, the number of those who considered themselves the followers of Ravidas had increased considerably in U.P. and the Punjab: G.W. Briggs, *The Chamars* (London, 1920), p. 210.

5. Between 1865 and 1901, total built-up areas increased from 5.02 sq. kms. to 13.8 sq. kms. in Kanpur, from 7.25 sq. kms. to 14.44 sq. kms. in Benares, from 6.48 sq. kms. to 15.23 sq. kms. in Allahabad, and from 6.73 sq. kms. to 9.97 sq. kms. in Lucknow. Cited in K.K. Dube, 'Use and Misuse of Land in the KAVAL towns (Uttar Pradesh)' (PhD thesis, Benares Hindu University, 1966), p. 10.

6. This was reflected, for instance, in the increase of municipal expenditure on conservancy services. In Allahabad: from Rs 67,917 in 1890–91 to Rs 110,201 in 1907–8; in Benares: from Rs 44,290 in 1890–91 to Rs. 83,211 in 1906–7; in Kanpur: from Rs 50,171 in 1890–1 to Rs 78,496 in 1907–8, with the highest

expenditure in this period recorded at Rs 203,331 in 1902–3; in Lucknow: from Rs 77,738 in 1890–91 to Rs 117,841 in 1907–8. Cited in H.R. Nevill, *District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh,* vol. XXIII: Allahabad (Allahabad, 1911); vol. XXVI: Benares; vol. XIX: Cawnpore; vol. XXXVII: Lucknow (Allahabad, 1909). Appendix, Table XVI. The expansion of sanitary and municipal services in Lucknow in the years after the 1857 uprising has been described in V.T. Oldenburg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow, 1956–1877* (Princeton, 1984), chs 2 and 4, *passim.*

7. H.R. Nevill, *Cawnpore: A Gazetteer,* vol. XIX, District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (Allahabad, 1909), pp. 104, 117.

8. The District Gazetteer of Kanpur in 1909, for instance, commented about the Chamars that, while in the fields 'formerly their position was that of mere serfs', in Kanpur city 'they are well off [as] is evident from the state of the labour market'. Ibid., p. 104.

9. In the leather and shoe workshops and factories of Kanpur, untouchable Hindu Chamars supplied the bulk of labourers, along with some lower- caste Muslims; *Royal Commission on Labour in India* (London, 1931), Evidence vol. III (United Provinces and Central Provinces), pt I (Written Evidence), p. 241, Evidence of the Superintendent, Harness and Leather Factory, Cawnpore. It is well known that untouchables formed the entire workforce in the municipal conservancy services and still do.

10. Mentioned in Ram Shankar Shukla, 'Karmchari Sangathan aur Andolan Kyun?', in *Kanpur Bazar Karmchari Federation: Rajat Jayanti Smarika* (Kanpur Market Employees Federation: Silver Jubilee Souvenir; Kanpur, 1977), editorial article (pages not numbered). Interviews in the Kanpur cloth and grain markets in Generalganj, Naughara and Collectorganj, with shop employees: Ram Kripal Yadav, Ramfer Khalifa, Ram Shankar Shukla, and Dutt Ram Yadav.

11. *Report on the Administration of the Police of the United Provinces,* 1935.

12. *Allahabad Municipal Board Annual Report,* 1937–8, pp. 38–42. This report mentioned that settlements of untouchable groups were concentrated on unreclaimed land in the town, along canal banks or marshy river fronts, where drainage and sanitary facilities were nonexistent. Later surveys and studies on

various towns also mention the continued trend of residential segregation of lower castes: R. Mukerjee and B. Singh, *Social Profiles of a Metropolis: Social and Economic Structure of Lucknow, Capital of Uttar Pradesh, 1954-56* (London, 1961), pp. 4–5; Vidyadhar Agnihotri, *Housing Conditions of Factory Workers in Kanpur* (Lucknow, 1954), pp 32–3; A. Singh, 'Varanasi: A Study in Urban Sociology' (PhD thesis, Benares Hindu University, 1971), pp. 81–2; B.N. Pande, *Allahabad: Retrospect and Prospect* (Allahabad, 1955), pp. 345–58. The separation of lower-caste residences among factory workers in Kanpur in the 1930s has been discussed in C. Joshi, 'Bonds of Community, Ties of Religion; Kanpur Textile Workers in the Early Twentieth Century', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 22, 3 (1985), p. 254.

13. The revival of bhakti and the new religion of Ad Dharm that developed from it in the towns of the Punjab in the early twentieth century, described by M. Juergensmeyer, had a different social origin. Here, a relatively affluent section of untouchable entrepreneurs had emerged, who owned leather factories and were engaged in the leather trade. Juergensmeyer has suggested that bhakti in the Punjab towns provided the 'symbols of identity and ethical standards for a new species of lower caste entrepreneur': M. Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision: The Movement against Untouchability in 20th Century Punjab* (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 114–23. In the U.P. towns, discussed here, there is no evidence to suggest the emergence of an untouchable entrepreneurial class.

14. It was mentioned in several interviews that I conducted in the towns that at the turn of the century 'everyone' became *bhagat* and *kanthidhari* (wearer of *kanthi).*

15. Interview with D.C. Dinkar (untouchable politician) in Lucknow. He mentioned that funds for temple building, as well as to set up neighbourhood schools, were raised at religious congregations (*bhandaras)* or at the meetings of panchayats, which were attended by most caste members, and each person or family contributed one or two annas. He explained that this was the reason why it took a long time, between 1924 and 1933, to build a Ravidas temple in Lucknow. He stated that individual untouchables in the towns were not affluent enough to be able to finance temple construction, and hence this had to be a community effort.

16. Interview with the present head priest or *mahant* of the Shivnarayanis in Allahabad. He mentioned that his ancestors had started the Sampradaya in the military brigade, after they migrated to Allahabad in the first decade of the twentieth century. The present *mahant* is still called the Brigade *mahant*, even though the Shivnarayanis are now not confined to the cantonment. The term 'Brigade' in this case indicates the roots of the Shivnarayanis in urban military cantonments and suggests that the worshipping of Swami Shivnarayan re-emerged in the towns, rather than being a direct continuity from rural cults.

17. Interviews with the *mahant* of the temple (who claimed to be 100 years old, and has been the *mahant* for nearly eight decades) and with Ram Narayan, cook at the Railway Retiring Room, Varanasi Junction, and a member of the governing body of the temple. The *mahant* mentioned that there were fifty-six local groups of Shivnarayanis at the beginning of the century in various untouchable neighbourhoods, who contributed, as they could afford, to repair the temple, where they regularly met.

18. This temple is believed to have been set up in the 1919s or 1920s.

19. Interview in Kanpur with Hanuman Prasad Kureel, an untouchable politician.

20. Interview in Lucknow with Dilip Chaudhuri (former head of the Chamar panchayat), D.C. Dinkar (untouchable politician), and with priests at the temple.

21. Interview with Gopi Dom and my own visit to the temple.

22. Interviews with untouchable politicians, Hanuman Prasad Kureel in Kanpur and Sita Ram Visharad in Benares.

23. W. Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh,* vol. II, p. 188.

24. A U.P. police report in 1922 referred to a 'spirit of revolt' among untouchables, which appears to be an allusion to bhakti resurgence and the development of the Adi Hindu movement. *Weekly Police Abstract of Intelligence,* U.P. (hereafter PAI), 13, 1 April 1922.

25. Dr. Rampravesh Singh, 'Neeche se Upar ki aud ki Gatishilata' in *Ravidas* (Benares), *Praveshank* (Introductory Issue) 1 (24 February 1986), pp. 21–6.

26. D.C. Dinkar, *Swatantrata Sangram mein Acchuton ka Yogdan* (Lucknow, 1986), p. 89.

27. Chandrika Prasad Jijnasu, *Adi Hindu Andolan ka Prabartak Sri Swami Acchutanand Harihar* (Lucknow, 1968, second edn; hereafter Acchutanand blog.), pp. 9–10.

28. A.P Chaudhury, *Picchre Tatha Dalit Barg ke Mahan Neta Rai Ram Charan ka Jivan Charit Tatha Unke Sanshipta Karya* (Lucknow, 1973; hereafter Ram Charan blog.), pp. 1–2.

29. Acchutanand blog., pp. 10–11 and 98–9; Ram Charan blog., p. 3.

30. P. Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 208; G. Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York, 1982), pp. 192–3.

31. K.W. Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India,* vol. III, pt 1; *Socio-Religious Reform Movement in British India* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 217–18.

32. J.T.F Jordens, 'Hindu Religious and Social Reform in British India', in Basham, *Cultural History*, p. 380.

33. Acchutanand blog., pp. 11–12 and 31; Ram Charan blog., pp. 8–9.

34. Extracts from speeches in Acchutanand blog., p. 11 (tr. from Hindi).

35. Extracts from speeches in Ram Charan blog., pp. 8–9 (tr. from Hindi).

36. Acchutanand blog., pp. 9–10; Ram Charan blog., p. 4.

37. Acchutanand blog., p. 12.

38. A different concept of pre-Aryan Indian races of warrior Kshatriyas had surfaced earlier in western India in the nineteenth century, in this case tracing the ancestry of touchable agricultural and pastoral Sudra castes; R. O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low-Caste Protests in Nineteenth Century Western India* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 141–51.

39. The British view of 'caste as race' and its incorporation in the census have recently been discussed at length in R. Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 56–66.

40. The missionaries of the Theosophical Society, for example, actively propounded the theory that the caste system originated among the Aryans and that the Aryans formed a separate race from the 'aborigines' of India; E.F. Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1919–1929* (Berkeley, 1969), pp. 28–9. A similar argument about the ancient racial origin of the untouchables was mentioned by G.W. Briggs, in his history of the Chamars, written in 1920 as part of a series of monographs published by the Young Men's Christian Association, which reflected the ideas that the missionaries were preaching among the untouchables: Briggs, *The Chamars,* pp. 11-15.

41. Acchutanand blog., pp. 72–4.

42. Interview with Hanuman Prasad Kureel, untouchable politician of Kanpur. Acchutanand lived in the house of Hanuman Prasad's father.

43. *PAI* 30, 8 August 1925.

44. Ibid., 35, 11 September 1926.

45. Ibid., 14, 9 April 1927.

46. Acchutanand blog., pp. 108-9 (tr. from Hindi).

47. Ram Charan blog., p. 83 (tr. from Hindi).

48. The following account is based on extracts from speeches and writings of Acchutanand and Ram Charan, cited in their biographies: Acchutanand blog., pp. 54–71 and 84–6; Ram Charan blog., pp. 5–10, 17–19, 80–4.

49. M. Juergensmeyer has argued that in the Punjab, Ad Dharm (original religion) was projected as a *qaum* or independent religion, rather than as a religious *panth* (path, way) or sect, which worshipped God in a particular way; Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision,* pp. 45–55. The implications of Adi Hinduism in U.P.

were similar, though the distinction between *qaum* and *panth* was not overtly made in the same vocabulary.

50. Ram Charan blog., p. 84; extract from a speech delivered in 1927 (tr. from Hindi).

51. Acchutanand blog., pp. 54–7) and 84-6; Ram Charan blog., pp. 5–10, 17–19, and 80–4.

52. The reference to a past golden age of power, and subsequent dispossession, was a feature that appeared in low-caste movements in other parts of India. R. O'Hanlon has discussed the significance of the idea of a golden age in the formation of caste identity in western India in the nineteenth century.

53. Interview with Chedi Lal Sathi (untouchable politician) in Lucknow. The economic importance of social reforms among low castes has been highlighted by Lucy Carroll, 'The Temperance Movement in India: Politics and Social Reform', *Modern Asian Studies* 10, 3 (1976), pp. 417–47.

54. Interviews with Chedi Lal Sathi Sita Ram Visharad (untouchable politicians) in Lucknow, and Nageshwar Valmiki (leader of the municipal sweepers union) in Kanpur.

55. Interviews with D.C. Dinkar and Chedi Lal Sathi (untouchable politicians) in Lucknow, and Hanuman Prasad Kureel (untouchable politician and son of an Adi Hindu leader) in Kanpur.

56. *Annual Report of the Benares Municipal Board*, 1924–25, p. 13.

57. Ibid., 1925–6, p. 17.

58. For an argument about 'Sanskritisation' in low-caste social movements, see M.N. Srinivas, 'A Note on Sanskritisation and Westernisation', in *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays* (Bombay, 1962), pp. 42–62.

59. Interview with Nageshwar Valmiki in Kanpur. He could not remember exactly when this began, but dated it roughly in the 1930s.

60. Interview with Chedi Lal Sathi in Lucknow.

Chapter 6

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1. Seth, *A Suitable Boy,* 3.

2. Ryali, 'Matrimonials: A Variation of Arranged Marriages', 107. Other researchers who have written on the subject argue a similar viewpoint, that matrimonials are a modern innovation. See Das, 'An Analysis of the Matrimonial Columns Advertisements of Newspapers', 151–6; Serena Nanda, 'Arranging a Marriage in India', 137–43.

3. A survey of the Census documents reveals that Calcutta was the largest and most populous city of the British empire in India. There was large-scale migration into the city from rural areas especially in East Bengal. The cost of living was rising and housing was a major problem. For more details see *Report on the Census of Calcutta,* 1891, 17–19; *Census of India*, vol. VI, pt I, 3–20.

4. This process of modernization has been addressed in a variety of historical literature. For a brief history of socio-cultural movements and a history of reform, see Sarkar, *A Critique of Colonial India,* chs 1–4; Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal*; Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1840–1905.* Tanika Sarkar emphasizes the importance of this period in terms of the growth of a literate Hindu public sphere during this period in her work. See Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism.* Anne Hardgrove's analysis of the rise of a Marwari public culture during this period highlights the heterogeneous nature of the city's population during this time. Anne Hardgrove, *Community and Public Culture: The Marwaris in Calcutta.*

5. Mukherjee, *Calcutta: Essays in Urban History,* 126. In the first wave of immigration into the city, there was some effort made by the city's elite to foster and maintain certain *jajmani,* patron–client relationships with petty professionals

who served the family through generations. The creation of *jajmani* relationships in the colonial city bears out the argument made by Peter Mayer in the context of such relationships in the Gangetic plain. Mayer argues that the *jajmani* system was of a relatively recent origin, the result of the growing partition of *zamindari* and *bhaiyacharya* villages into individual holdings and the growing pressure on landholders to offer significant incentives to village artisans to retain their services. See Mayer, 'Inventing Village Tradition: The Late 19th Century Origins of the *Jajmani* System', 357–95.

6. Mukherjee, *Calcutta: Essays in Urban History,* 174.

7. Ibid., 175.

8. Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal,* 279.

9. Ibid., 279–80.

10. William Carey's *Kathopakathana* (Conversations) has a chapter devoted to the task of *ghatakali* (the task of matchmaking as carried out by *ghataks).* Carey shares none of the scepticism about *ghataks* that became rampant later on in the century. See, Carey, *Kathopakathana,* 60–2 (first published in 1801).

11. Johnson, *The Stranger in India, Or, Three Years in Calcutta,* 229.

12. Shri Hridacnath Basu-Varma, 'Kayastha Ghatak', 1919, 10–11. The names of famous *ghatak*s mentioned by Basu-Varma recur in the accounts of writers like Nagendranath Basu. But more details on these individuals await further research.

13. See Vidyanidhi, *Sambandhyanirnaya: Mula Aitihasika Bhag,* pt I; Basu, *Bangera Jatiya Itihasa.* For a historical analysis of the genealogical literature and some debates that occurred in the late nineteenth and twentieth century around this body of work, see Kumkum Chatterjee, 'The King of Controversy: History and Nation-Making in Late Colonial India', 1454–75; 'Communities, Kings, and Chronicles: The Kulagranthas of Bengal', 173–213.

14. A sub-caste among the Kayasthas who traditionally resided in the southern Rarh region which is present-day Hoogly, Burdwan, Tamluk, parts of Midnapur and Nadia. For further details about the subdivision among castes in Bengal, see Vidyanidhi, *Sambandhyanirnaya: Mula Aitihasika Bhag*, pt I; Basu, *Bangera Jatiya*

Itihasa. For a more recent history of these subdivisions, see Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture.*

15. Basu-Varma, 'Kayastha Ghatak', 13.

16. Nagendranath Basu, *Visvakosa,* 2. These volumes were first published between 1886–1911.

17. Anon, *'Bibahera Ghatkali*, 228–30.

18. Ibid., 228.

19. Ibid., 229.

20. Ibid., 230.

21. Ibid.

22. Johnson, *The Stranger in India, Or, Three Years in Calcutta,* 229–30.

23. Dutta, *Kalikatar Purano Katha O Kahini* (Tales of Old Calcutta), 64.

24. Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849–1905,* 47.

25. Sena, *Jibansmriti* (Reminiscences of Life), 45–7.

26. Mukhopadhyaya, *Sankhiptya Jibanabrittanta* (A Brief Account of my Life), 5.

27. Bose, *The Hindoos As They Are,* 41

28. Mukherji, *Prostitution In India,* 197.

29. *Prajapati,* 1909; republished several times.

30. Ibid.

31. *Prajapati,* 20 June 1911, 20–1.

32. Ibid., 21.

33. Ibid.

34. 'Ghatak-Sangha: Niyamabali' (Rules of Ghatak-Sangha), *Ghatak,* 1927, vol. 1, nos. 4–5.

35. A large number of social satires, in Bengali, many of which were staged in theatres all over Calcutta, are significant in this regard. Some of the most popular ones were Basu, *Bibaha Bibhrat* (Wedding Fiasco); Mukhopadhyaya, *Koner Maa Kande ar Takar Putuli Bandhe* (The Bride's Mother Weeps and Ties Bags of Money), 1863; Basu, *Value Payable.* For a detailed account of various other plays popular in the nineteenth century where the theme of exploitation by *ghataks* was an important motif, see Goswami, *Samajchitre Unibingsha Satabdir Bangla Prahashan (Picture of Society as Revealed in Nineteenth Century Bengali Farce).*

36. *Ghatak,* 1927, vols 4–5, 76.

37. *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 14 November 1929.

38. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 26 March 1926.

39. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 19 November 1929.

40. *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 17 November 1929.

41. 'Bibahajogya Kanya' (Marriageable girls), *Kayastha Patrika,* November–December 1910, 304.

42. Bandyopadhyay, *Caste Politics and the Raj,* 144.

43. See. for instance, Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal, 1872–1947.*

44. For instance, see Majumdar, *Jibanera Smritidipe,* 1978.

45. *Mahisya Mahila* started in 1911; *Prajapati,* a Sadgop journal started in 1909.

46. Pal Chowdhury, *Sachitra Panapratha,* 103.

47. Numerous articles on these two issues appeared in both *Kayastha Samaja* and *Kayastha Patrika.* A few examples are: 'Upanayanaera Prayajan ki?' (What is the Utility of a Thread Ceremony?), *Kayastha Samaja* (June–July), 1924, 123–8; 'Kayasther Jagyopobita' (Sacred Thread for *Kayasthas) Kayastha Samaja* (June–

July) 1923, 133–43, *'Samaja O Dharma'* (Society and religion), in *Kayastha Samaja* (September–October) 1920, 705–13.

48. 'Patra Sambandhe Proshno' (Questions about the Bridegroom) and 'Patri Sambandhe Proshno' (Questions about the Bride), *Prajapati* (February–March) 1909, 191. The questions were posed by the Manager, *Prajapati,* Bibaha Bibhag [Marriage Section], 102 Corporation Street, Calcutta.

49. I have borrowed this expression from current usage in modern-day matrimonials. The Bengali idiom current in the 1920s and in the present is *ujjwala shyama varna*, literally meaning glistening dark complexion. Fairness is a privileged asset in India. Referring to a person's complexion as bright, yet dark, is to emphasize lightness of colour as opposed to the deep brown complexion common in the tropics.

50. *Ghatak* (December–January), 1927, 74. The expressions 'up-to-date' and 'highly connected' appear in the original.

51. *Kayastha Patrika,* October–November 1910, 225.

52. For instance *Kayastha Patrika,* April–May, 1910 reported a wedding that took place without dowry transactions on 16 Phalgun (7 March) 1909 between the younger son of Sri Gopalchandra Singha and the Raja of Baghbazar, Sri Gokul Chandra Mitra's great-granddaughter. Conversely it also reported the wedding of Sri Dwarkanath Dutta's son to the daughter of Barrister Jatindranath Mitra's daughter on 21 Phalgun (12th March) 1909 where such exchange took place.

53. Ibid., 80–1.

54. Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation,* 2001; Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories,* 1993; Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India,* 2001.

55. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference,* 227–8.

56. Ibid., 228.

57. *Kap* refers to a sub category within a sub-caste division.

58. 'Ghatak', *Prajapati,* July 1911, 44. Kashyap refers to *gotra* which is representative of a *kula* or clan. In the second insertion many of the particulars, such as *devgan, karkat rashi* (the equivalent of Cancer in the zodiac), are descriptions from horoscopes. Horoscope matching was an important feature in weddings.

59. Ibid., 46.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid., 47.

62. See below. Advertisements from lending agencies were very common throughout the period 1890–1940. There are many instances in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* as well. For example, see *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 26 March 1936.

63. *Bengal Times,* 3 January 1890. This advertisement was repeatedly published on 11, 13, and 22 January 1890.

64. *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 10 October 1929. 'p.m.' refers to per month.

65. *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 19 November 1929.

66. Bhattacharya, *Amar Smritikatha*, 109.

67. *Ghatak* is the nomenclature for a professional marriage negotiator, and *ghatakali* refers to the practice of negotiation.

68. Ibid., 12.

69. Ibid., 109.

70. Basu-Mullick, 'Biyer Bigyapan' (Marriage Advertisements), *Kayastha Patrika,* May 1940, 40.

71. Ibid., 40–1.

72. See Dipesh Chakrabarty's discussion on widow remarriage and the fear of sexual scandals that lay at the heart of Vidyasagar's widow remarriage reform campaign. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe,* 132–3.

73. *Swayambharas* are referred to in ancient Indian literature where princesses would choose their husbands from among a number of prospective suitors. Well-known instances of *swayambharas* are Sita's in the *Ramayana,* Draupadi's in the *Mahabharata.*

74. Ibid., p. 42.

75. Ibid., pp. 42–3.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid., 43.

78. Ibid., 42.

79. Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered,* 88–9.

80. For a nuanced reading of the construction of culture and the importance of this category in Bengali *bhadralok* identity, see Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition 1932–1947,* 150–90. Chatterji refers to the exclusiveness engendered by the culture category to the *bhadralok* class, its failure to embrace within its ambit low-class Muslims as well as Hindus.

81. Gopalakrishnan, *Hindu Marriage Law*; Chakrabarty, *Hindu Acara Anusthan.* The Hindu Marriage Act which among other things, ratified divorce among Hindus was passed in 1955.

82. For a discussion of these texts and their impact on contemporary thought and life, see Borthwick, *The Changing Roleof Women in Bengal, 1849–1905.*

Chapter 7

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1. Ann Laura Stoler, "In Cold Blood": Hierarchies of Credibility and the Politics of Colonial Narratives', *Representations,* no. 37 (Winter 1992): 151–89.

2. *Yedu and Others v. the State of Maharashtra* was filed in Gangapur *taluka* as case number 768/64. It was shifted to the Aurangabad District and Sessions Court when both parties alleged that there was undue pressure and interference in the case. The *taluka* court ruled on 28 December 1964, under the supervision of Judicial Magistrate First Class, P.E. Vani. The case was filed in Aurangabad District and Sessions Court as Criminal Appeal no. 6/1965 on 16 January 1965. The sessions court passed judgment on June 30, 1965, under the supervision of Judge C.J. Dighe. The case then went to the Bombay High Court as Criminal Revision Application no. 622/1965, and Justice V.M. Tarkhunde ruled on 29 March 1966. Both the sessions court and the Bombay High Court upheld the judgment passed by the judicial magistrate, with slight modification.

3. Ranajit Guha, 'Chandra's Death', in *Subaltern Studies V: Writings on South Asian History and Society,* ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 140.

4. The representation of the social world as objective fact is inextricable from our perception of social distinction and difference as transparent or real. I use the term 'publicity' to refer to those evidentiary practices and knowledge protocols that mediate or enframe social representation *as information.* I draw here on Timothy Mitchell's resonant description of 'enframing' as the ideological work of rendering concept into image, of materializing or visually condensing emergent structures of knowledge and power. See also his more recent arguments about the transformation of information into expertise. Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), and idem, *Rule of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

5. *Marathwada* focused on regional underdevelopment from the 1960s onward, and articulated a distinctive Marathwada *asmita* [identity] formed in opposition to the Nizam of Hyderabad, who had ruled over the region until 1948. Given its Socialist leanings, the newspaper framed its opposition to feudal rule, rather than formulating this as an explicitly anti-Muslim position.

6. *MLA Debates,* vol. 12, pt 12, 11 March–5 April 1964, 693–703 (discussion under a cut motion); and *MLC Debates,* vol. 12, no. 3, 12 February–3 April 1964.

7. Aurangabad District and Sessions Court, Judgment on Criminal Appeal no. 5/1965, judgment of 30 June 1965, under the supervision of C.J. Dighe.

8. Ibid.

9. For the etiology of scandal as a specific form of publicity, see Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006) ; Anupama Rao, 'Problems of Violence, States of Terror Torture in Colonial India', in *Discipline and the Other Body: Correction, Corporeality and Colonialism,* ed. Steven Pierce and Anupama Rao (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 151–85; and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *The Scandal of the State: Women, Law, and Citizenship in Postcolonial India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

10. *Marathwada,* 5 January 1964, front page.

11. Aurangabad District and Sessions Court, Criminal Appeal no. 5/1965, judgment of 30 June 1965, under the supervision of C.J. Dighe.

12. Ibid.

13. D.R. Nagaraj, *The Flaming Feet: A Study of the Dalit Movement in India* (Bangalore: South Forum Press, 1993), 38.

14. *Taluka* court judgment, 28 December 1964, under the supervision of Judicial Magistrate First Class, PE. Vani (emphasis added).

15. Judge Dighe noted that Dalit women had been carrying water through the village for two years, indicating that they were banned from doing so earlier.

16. Saurabh Dube, *Untouchable Pasts: Religion, Identity, and Power among a Central Indian Community, 1780–1950* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998).

17. *Taluka* court judgment, 28 December 1964, under the supervision of Judicial Magistrate First Class, PE. Vani.

18. Aurangabad District and Sessions Court, Criminal Appeal no. 5/1965, judgment of 30 June 1965, under the supervision of C.J. Dighe.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid. (emphasis added).

21. Ibid. (emphasis added).

22. It is important that S., picking up on statements by the perpetrators, recalled access to water as the source of the Sirasgaon conflict.

23. Aurangabad District and Sessions Court, Criminal Appeal no. 5/1965, judgment of 30 June 1965, under the supervision of C.J. Dighe.

24. Ibid. (emphasis added).

25. See E. Valentine Daniel, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 81–3.

26. Lee Schlesinger notes that a village usually has one *ves* in each cardinal direction. Personal communication, 21 March 1998. In Sirasgaon there was only one *ves*, and it was in ruins.

27. We have already seen that *muralis'* marriages were advertised in the pages of *Somavanshiya Mitra.* The following intercaste marriages were noted in *Bahishkrit Bharat:* A Mahar girl named Shevanti with a Mang boy named Narayan Kunde, in Bhamburde, Pune, BB, 20 May 1927; Lakshmibai Kamble, a Dalit Mahar, with Dataram Rangnath Upasak, a Maratha, BB, 12 November 1928; Devikabai Gaikwad, a Dalit woman, with a Brahmin with the last name Sathe, in Pune, 12 April 1929. The editor of *Janata,* the Deshashta Brahmin B.R. Kadrekar, was married to a Dalit woman. The editor of *Muknayak*, Pandurang Bhatkar, had married a Brahman. Activist D.G. Jadhav was married to Kamlakant Chitre's daughter. Chitre, a member of the Social Service League, was involved in the Mahad satyagraha. *Janta* often carried congratulatory notices on these intercaste marriages.

28. Accounts of men and women lynched for engaging in intercaste relationships or eloping to marry are continued evidence of the political volatility of sexual relations that transgress caste boundaries. For an analysis of elopement in colonial and postcolonial perspective, see Prem Chowdhry, *Contentious Marriages, Eloping Couples: Gender, Caste and Patriarchy in Northern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007). Famous cases include the 'Bodi riots', which took place

from September to October 1989 after a Dalit woman was sexually abused and killed in southwest Tamil Nadu. As Dalit activists called for the abduction of upper-caste women, a caste riot ensued, leading to thirty deaths, mass injuries, and damage to property. In Chundur, a village in Andhra Pradesh, at least eight (and up to fifteen) people were hacked to death on 6 August 1991, due to unsubstantiated rumours that a Dalit boy had molested a young woman from the dominant Reddy caste at a movie theatre. On 22 September 1992, Bhanwari Devi, a grassroots worker (*sathin*) in the Rajasthan government's Women's Development Programme, was gang-raped in front of her husband for reporting a child marriage. The police refused to register the case, arguing that she was too old and unattractive to have been raped by anyone. The trial judge acquitted the accused, noting, 'An upper-caste man could not have defiled himself by raping a lower-caste woman.' 'Attacks on Dalit Women: A Pattern of Impunity', in *Broken People: Caste Violence against India's Untouchables* (New York: Human Rights Watch 1999), 176–7, http://www.hrw.or/legacy/reports/1999/india; K. Balagopal, 'Chundur and Other Chundurs', *Economic and Political Weekly* 26, no. 42 (19 October 1991): 2399–2405; Gabrielle Dietrich, 'Dalit Movements and Women's Movements', in *Reflections on the Womens Movement: Religion, Ecology, Development* (New Delhi: Horizon India, 1992), 73–93; Kancha Ilaiah, 'The Chundur Carnage: The Struggle of Dalits', in *At Cross-Roads: Dalit Movement Today,* ed. Sandeep Pendse (Bombay: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 1994); and Samata Sanghatana Report, 'Upper Caste Violence: Study of Chunduru Carnage', *Economic and Political Weekly* 26, no. 36 (7 September 1991): 2079–84. We see here that the overdetermination of sexual violence as caste punishment forecloses the possibility of cross-caste desire, which runs the risk of being misrecognized as violence. Or else, that sexual desire is always already aligned with patriarchal power, as in the case of Dalit men's desire for upper-caste women, as a recent study argues. S. Anandhi, J. Jeyaranjan, and Ranjan Krishnan, 'Work, Caste and Competing Masculinities: Notes from a Tamil Village', *Economic and Political Weekly* (26 October 2002). Intercaste marriage thus remains a biopolitical frontier for caste emancipation.

29. Ambedkarite politics was shaped by negotiations with the colonial state and Indian nationalism, and worked through institutional forms such as the caste association. Between 1917 and 1927, three national women's organizations had emerged—the Women's India Association, the National Council of Women in

India, and the All-India Women's Conference, with the latter emerging as the premier women's organization by 1940. Dalit women's organizations grew out of this conjuncture, which saw the emergence of the woman activist as a distinct figure. Two women, Savitribai Borade and Ambubai Gaikwad, were appointed to *Janata* in 1930. By 1930, Mahila Parishads, or Women's Conferences, were being organized, and in 1936 the Mahila Parishad resolved to reserve one of three seats for SC women in provincial legislative councils. The ILP years—which saw increased militancy around caste labour more generally—saw demands for equal wages for female mill workers, support for compulsory education for Dalit girls through scholarships, and programmes to encourage young women to finish their education before getting married. Urmil Pawar and Meenakshi Moon, *Amhihi Itihas Ghadavila: Ambedkar Calvalit Striyancha Sahbhag* (We Too Made History: Women's Participation in the Ambedkar Movement; Mumbai: Stree Uvac Prakashan, 1998), 73. Anjana Deshbratar noted the social segregation of Dalit women at the 1938 meeting of the All-India Women's Congress in Nagpur. This led to support for separate organizations of Dalit women. The All-India Untouchable Women's Conference was formed in 1942, along with the AISCR Women's employment and education was a focus throughout. Pawar and Moon, *Amhihi Itihas Ghadavila,* 80. Women also played a critical role in the black flag demonstrations in 1946 and the landless struggles of 1956 and 1964. Ibid., 81–4, 100–21.

30. For a discussion of Dalit feminism along with excerpts from selected texts, see Anupama Rao, ed., *Gender and Caste: Contemporary Issues in Indian Feminism* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2003).

31. Quoted in Dube, *Untouchable Pasts,* 171. For a moving account of Muli, who pimped Dalit women for a living, see James M. Freeman, *Untouchable: An Indian Life History* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979). In *Kolhatyache Por* (Child of the Kolhatis), Kishore Shantabai Kale writes of being born in the community of *tamasha* performers to a mother who abandons him to negligent relatives. The autobiography is an extended meditation on coerced sexual labor and social illegitimacy. Kishore Shantabai Kale, *Against All Odds,* trans. Sandhya Pandey (Delhi: Penguin, 2000).

32. Feminist critiques of Lévi-Strauss's position on marriage as gift exchange are numerous and date to a period in disciplinary anthropology dominated by

feminist debates about the geohistorical limits (and theoretical relevance) of 'gender' as a category of analysis. The two critiques I find particularly useful are Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic of Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex', in *Towards an Anthropology of Women,* ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157–210; and Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Rubin theorizes limits to Marxist, psychoanalytic, and anthropological conceptions of sex/gender, while Strathern revisits the theory of the gift by examining the dangers of Western social categorization occluding Melanesian paradigms of gendered sociality. A sophisticated exploration of the relationship between European social theory and the social history of colonialism in constituting gendered subalternity can be found in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Scattered Speculations on the Theory of Value', and 'Breastgiver', in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 154–78, 222–40.

33. Garole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 19–76.

34. Susie Tharu, 'The Impossible Subject: Caste and the Gendered Body', in *Gender and Caste*, 261–75.

35. In her brilliant study of the paradoxes of sexual subjugation in the antebellum South, Saidiya Hartman explores how the legal bifurcation of slave as person and property enabled the disappearance of 'sexual violence' from the law. Since sexual violence neither incapacitated the slave for work nor inflicted damage to the slave as *value-producing property,* rape and molestation did not figure in the regime of partial commodification that defined chattel slavery. Another enabling paradox, the assumption of the slave's passion (and black sexuality) as provoking consensual sex, also served to occlude sex as violence. Neither the laws of property nor personhood allowed recognition of the constitution of female slave subjectivity through violation. Saidiya Hartman, 'Seduction and the Ruse of Power', in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press), 79–114.

36. Fact-finding report of the Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti, which visited Khairlanji on 6 October 2006, 'Kherlanji Other Reports: A Buddhist Family

Massacred', along with other fact-finding and newspaper reports available at Atrocity News, http:///atrocitynews.wordpress.com/manuski-centre-khairlanje-report.

37. Anand Teltumbe, 'Khairlanji and Its Aftermath: Exploding Some Myths', *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 12 (24 March 2007): 1019–25.

38. Bhaiyyalal, a witness to the violence (and sole survivor of the Bhotmange family), failed to get the case registered with the police. The case was initially dismissed as the handiwork of Maoist extremists; the special inspector general of police was bribed; and government doctors failed to check for sexual assault while conducting the postmortems. No visits from state functionaries or upper-level police were forthcoming. The bodies of the two women were exhumed and a second autopsy conducted on 5 October due to mounting public pressure. *Organised Killings of Dalits in Khairlanji Village, Tal. Mohadi, Dist. Bhandara* (Pune: YASHADA, November 2006).

39. *The Hindu,* 16 September 2008.

40. Smriti Kopplikar, quoting Nagsen Sonware, president of the Ambedkar Centre for Peace and Justice, in 'Beat the Drum', *Outlook,* 18 December 2006.

41. Dalit feminism is agonistic, not antagonistic, to a mainstream Indian feminism that has typically addressed caste as antimodern and antisecular. Like the critique of race and gender by African American feminists who connect racialization with sexual violence, and sexual control with the reproduction of white privilege, Dalit feminists emphasize the role of sexual violence in reproducing caste privilege. For instance, the founding statement of the National Federation of Dalit Women notes that Dalit women are negatively defined within the framework of a hegemonic Brahminical patriarchy that privileges caste and sexual purity. On the other hand, says the National Federation of Dalit Women, Dalit women are also claimed as the sexual property of their community and are subject to bourgeois notions of respectability that are the consequence of the modern patriarchy of the Dalit family. Anupama Rao, introduction to *Gender and Caste*, 1–47.

42. A report by the CID tabulated 1166 offenses against SCs in 2007, compared to 1,053 during 2006, signifying an increase of 10.73 per cent. The report notes an

83.91 per cent increase in caste violence between 2002 and 2007. *The Hindu,* 27 September 2008.

Chapter 8

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1. See, for instance, Anthony T. Carter, *Elite Politics in Rural India: Political Stratification and Political Alliances in Western Maharashtra,* London, New York, 1974; V.M. Sirsikar, *The Rural Elite in a Developing Society: A Study in Political Sociology,* New Delhi, 1970; Jayant Lele, *Elite Pluralism and Class Rule: Political Development in Maharashtra, India,* Buffalo, 1981; Mary C. Carras. *The Dynamics of Indian Political Factions: A Study of District Councils in the State of Maharashtra,* Cambridge Eng., 1972; Livi Rodrigues, *Rural Political Protest in Western India,* Delhi, New York, 1998. Rodrigues' work, in particular, focuses on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but treats the 'Maratha-Kunbi' category as practically fixed.

2. The most important works in this regard are Bernard Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays,* Delhi, 1987; Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age,* New York, 1999; and Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India,* Princeton, 2001.

3. Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas, 1600–1818,* Cambridge/New York, 1993, pp. 182–208.

4. J.P. Guha, ed., *James Grant Duff. History of the Mahrattas,* 2 vols, New Delhi, 1971 [1826]; Sir John Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India*, London, 1823.

5. Thomas Duer Broughton, *Letters Written in a Mahratta Camp During the Year 1809. Descriptive of the Characters, Manners, Domestic Habits, and Religious Ceremonies, of the Mahrattas,* London, 1977 [1813], p. 72.

6. Ibid., p. 50.

7. Ibid., p. 71. Emphasis in original.

8. Richard Jenkins, *Report on the Territories of the Raja of Nagpore,* Nagpur, 1923, p. 19. I owe this reference to Sumit Guha.

9. Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India,* Cambridge/New York, 1985, pp. 15–23. An oft-quoted Marathi proverb captures this feature of upward mobility in rural society perfectly: *kunbi mazla; maratha zhala,* meaning, 'When a Kunbi prospers, he becomes a Maratha'. The anthropologist Iravati Karve's characterization of the Maratha-Kunbi caste groups as a 'cluster' of castes attempts to indicate precisely this mobility between groups that had different ritual and social practices, but displayed nevertheless a certain unity of customs, ties and linkages. See Iravati Karve, *Hindu Society: An Interpretation*, Pune, 1968.

10. Sumit Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India, 1200–1991,* New York, 1999, pp. 84–107.

11. Constable argues that this inclusiveness was gradually eroded in favour of an increasing Kshatriya exclusivity over the eighteenth century, especially under the Brahmanical policies of the Peshwas, but unfortunately fails to discuss contemporary sources that demonstrate such a turn towards Kshatriya *jati* exclusivity. Philip Constable, 'The Marginalization of a Dalit Martial Race in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Western India', *Journal of Asian Studies,* vol. 60 (2), 2001, pp. 439–78.

12. Prachi Deshpande, 'Narratives of Pride: History and Regional Identity in Maharashtra, c. 187–1960', unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Tufts University, 2002, Ch. 2.

13. The most widely cited work is D.H.A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hinduism, 1450–1850*, Cambridgeshire, 1990, but see also Stewart Gordon, 'Zones of Military Entrepreneurship in India, 1500–1700', in Steward Gordon, *Marathas, Marauders and State Formation in Eighteenth Century India,* New York, 1994, pp. 182–207;

Sumit Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India*, pp. 83–107, and Philip Constable, 'The Marginalization of a Dalit Race'.

14. M.S. Kanade, ed., *Bhausahebanchi Bakhar,* Pune, 1975, pp. 84–91. Also, see an excellent English translation of this *bakhar* in Ian Raeside, *Marathi Historical Papers and Chronicles: The Decade of Panipat (1751–61),* Bombay 1984, pp. 1–101.

15. The most oft-cited work in this regard is Hiroshi Fukazawa, 'State and Caste System (Jati) in the Eighteenth Century Maratha Kingdom', *Hitotsubashi Journal of Economics,* vol. 9 (1), 1968, pp. 32–44.

16. See Fukazawa, 'State and Caste System', p. 42; P.E. Gavail, *Society and Social Disabilities under the Peshwa,* Delhi, 1988, pp. 105–13; Sudha Desai, *Social Life in Maharashtra under the Peshwas,* Delhi, 1988, pp. 30–42.

17. P.E. Gavail, *Society and Social Disabilities,* p. 110.

18. Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India,* p. 70.

19. Uma Chakravarti, 'Gender, Caste and the State in Eighteenth Century Maharashtra', in Uma Chakravarti, *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai,* New Delhi, 1998, pp. 3–42.

20. Duff, *History of the Mahrattas,* p. 8.

21. See N.K. Wagle, 'A Dispute between the Pancal Devajna Sonars and the Brahmanas of Pune Regarding Social Rank and Ritual Privileges: A Case of the British Administration of Jati Laws in Maharashtra, 1822–1825', in N.K. Wagle, ed., *Images of Maharashtra: A Regional Profile of India,* London, 1980, pp. 129–59.

22. O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology,* pp. 24–49.

23. Ibid., pp. 41–5.

24. Gordon Johnson, 'Chitpavan Brahmans and Politics in Western India', in E.R. Leach and S.N. Mukherjee, eds, *Elites in South Asia,* Cambridge, 1970; Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India, 1873 to 1930,* Bombay, 1976, pp. 76–8; Veena Naregal, *Language Politics, Elites, and the Public Sphere, New Delhi, 2001; Uma Chakravarti, Rewriting History,* pp. 43–106.

25. Deshpande, 'Narratives of Pride'.

26. This claim of Brahman indispensability to the Maratha project was demonstrated most clearly in the elevation of the Brahman poet and contemporary of Shivaji, Samarth, Ramdas, as the chief moral force and spiritual guide behind the establishment of Maratha freedom in the writings of many Brahman nationalists. Pamphlets, novels and poetry on Ramdas as Shivaji's guru flooded the printed sphere in the early twentieth century, and were certainly a response to non-Brahman critiques of Brahman narratives on the Maratha past. Ibid., ch. 4.

27. O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology,* pp. 290–302.

28. Lokhande (1848–1907) was a contemporary of Phule's and like him, belonged to the Mali *jati.* He was active in the Satyashodhak Samaj not only as the editor of the *Din Bandhu* newspaper, but also as one of the earliest organisers of labour in the Bombay cotton mills. See Manohar Kadam, *Bharatiya Kamgar Chalvaliche Janak Narayan Meghaji Lokhande* (The Father of India's Labour Struggle Narayan Meghaji Lokhande), Pune, 1995.

29. *Din Bandhu,* 17 January 1886, *Report on Native Newspapers,* week ending 23 January 1886.

30. *Din Bandhu,* 21 October 1904, quoted in O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology,* p. 391.

31. Ibid., p. 294.

32. Ibid., p. 292. This statement was made by a speaker at a meeting of the society, which was founded in August 1882 in Bombay by Tukaramji Haraji Patil Salunkhe.

33. Ibid., p. 299.

34. Ibid., pp. 140–63.

35. Keshavrao Jedhe, *Chhatrapati Mela Sangraha* (Songs of the Chhatrapati Mela), Pune, 1928, p. 19. For a good, general survey of non-Brahman politics and personalities in the early twentieth century, see Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Acts of

Appropriation: Non-Brahman Radicals and the Congress in Early Twentieth Century Maharashtra', in Mike Shepperdson and Colin Simmons, eds., *The Indian National Congress and the Political Economy of India, 1885–1985,* Brookfield, 1988, pp. 102–46.

36. For an early account of Kolhapur politics and Shahu's interaction with the British government in enforcing policies favourable to non-Brahmans, see Ian Copland, 'The Maharaja of Kolhapur and the Non-Brahmin Movement, 1902–10', *Modern Asian Studies,* vol. 7(2), 1973, pp. 209–55, but a more comprehensive study in English is Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society,* pp. 124–36. An excellent study in Marathi is Y.D. Phadke, *Shahu Chhatrapati ani Lokamanya* (Shahu Chhatrapati and the Lokamanya), Pune, 1986.

37. An official reported in 1919, for instance, that his tea party with Mahars in Nashik had 'a disturbing effect in the neighbourhood and may have caused a rupture among the Marathas of the Maharajah's own caste, as the well-to-do Maratha of the rural area does not move easily with the times and cannot be expected to receive the Mahars with open arms at such short notice', Maharashtra State Archives (hereafter MSA) Mumbai, Home (Special) Files, no. 363, 1919, 'Brahmans vs. Non-Brahmans'.

38. In 1894, Brahmans occupied a total of 104 jobs in Shahu's government, while non-Brahmans occupied 18. No untouchable occupied any government post at this time. By 1922, Brahmans occupied 69 of these jobs, non-Brahmans 168, and one untouchable had been appointed. Similarly, the number of Brahman students in the Kolhapur schools in 1894 was 2522, with 8088 non-Brahman students and 264 untouchables. By 1922, however, while the number of Brahman students had increased only to 2722, the number of non-Brahman students had shot up to 21,027, and that of untouchable students to 2162. Although these figure do not give us a caste breakdown of Marathas and others in the non-Brahman category, it is worth postulating that the proportion of Marathas was higher, because of the many special educational privileges like hostels, scholarships, etc., that they got, both as part of Shahu's promotion and the numerous Maratha caste organisations. Y.D. Phadke, *Visavya Shatakatila Maharashtra* (Maharashtra in the Twentieth Century), 5 vols, vol. 1, Pune, 1989, p. 216.

39. MSA Mumbai, Home (Special) Files, No. 363. 'Brahmans vs. Non-Brahmans', B.V. Jadhav to A.L. Robertson, 16 May 1915.

40. Oriental and India Office Collections (hereafter OIOC), British Library, London, Files of the Indian Franchise Committee, Q/IFF/71 (Bombay) and Q/IFC/30 (CP-Berar).

41. R. Bhosale, 'History of the Freedom Movement in Satara District, 1885–1947', unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Shivaji University, 1978, pp. 195–6.

42. For a detailed description of caste conferences and the politics of local boards and representative politics in this period as part of non-Brahman organisation, see Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society,* pp. 171–206.

43. Mukundrao Patil (1886–1953), a Mali, was the son of one of Phule's associates, Krishnarao Bhalekar, but was adopted by a relative Ganpatrao Patil and grew up in relative comfort in Ahmednagar. He not only authored popular non-Brahman polemical tracts such as *Hindu ani Brahman* (Hindus and the Brahman), and *Kulkarni Lilanru* (The Kulkarni Saga), but also diligently edited the longest running non-Brahman newspaper *Din Mitra* from 1910–46.

44. Y.D. Phadke, *Keshavrao Jedhe,* Pune, 1982, p. 24.

45. Biographical information about Deshmukh has been difficult to trace, but we do know he was a wealthy landed deshmukh in Amravati and financed the publication and advertisement of his books on his own steam. In a 1921 tract, he argued that Brahmans were actually Muslim immigrants from Egypt and the progeny of prostitutes and servants and had subsequently tampered with Vedic texts to place themselves in a position of power. He also added that comparing the Marathas to Shudra castes such as Mahars, Mangs, gonds and Dhors was *atmaghaataki,* or a blow to the Kshatriya Marathas' very soul. K.B. Deshmukh, *Kshatriya Vaishyancha Brahmanshi Samana* (The Kshatriyas and Vaishyas Face Off with the Brahmans), Amravati, 1921, p. 28.

46. Jedhe (1896–1959), in fact, represents this growing Maratha/Maratha-Kunbi presence in the movement. His family, urbanised and upwardly mobile in Pune, claimed descent from the Jedhe deshmukh contemporaries of Shivaji, and provided considerable support and leadership to the movement in Pune. Jedhe

went on to be an important Congressman in the 1940s and 1950s briefly joining the Peasants and Workers Party in the 1950s. Y.D. Phadke's political biography provides an excellent overview of his politics and ideological approach. Phadke, *Keshavrao Jedhe.* Javalkar (1898–1932) was also a Maratha-Kunbi, but with humbler origins. His fierce anti-Brahman polemic was featured in controversial tracts such as *Deshache Dushman* (Enemies of the Country). Following a trip to England in 1929–30, he became dissatisfied with non-Brahman caste rhetoric and became increasingly Communist in his orientation, advocating peasant issues before his ultimately death in 1932. His writings can be found in Y.D. Phadke, ed., *Dinkarrao Javalkar Samagra Vangmaya* (The Collected Writings of Dinkarrao Javalkar), Pune, 1984.

47. MSA Mumbai, Home (Spl) 355 (64) II, 'Mahad Satyagraha', CID Report, 31 January 1928.

48. Shripatrao Shinde, also a Maratha-Kunbi, was the son of a merchant from Kolhapur. A protégé of Shahu, he combined his work as a Satyashodhak activist with a job as a colonial policeman, but quit the latter job to move to Pune in 1918 and edit the newspaper *Vijayai Maratha* as a non-Brahman alternative to the hugely popular *Kesari,* mouthpiece of nationalist brahmans such as Tilak. Bhagwantrao Palekar (1882–1973) also came from a Maratha-Kunbi family which was not well-off, but had Satyashodhak connections; they moved in search of financial opportunities from Nasik to Baroda, where Palekar had some schooling. He worked in several newspaper offices and printing presses in Bombay and Baroda before starting the non-Brahman newspaper *Jagruti,* which he edited from 1917–49. His editorials and autobiography are available in Sadanand More, ed., *Jagrutikar Palekar* (Marathi), Pune, 1996.

49. See *Jagruti,* 15 February 1919; *Vijayai Maratha,* 6 January 1930 for examples.

50. *Vijayai Maratha,* 7 April 1930. See also the advertisement 'Excellent Histories of the Kshatriyas' for a series of books by K.B. Deshmukh of Amravati in *Maratha Navjeevan*, 7 April 1936, p. 9.

51. Rashmi Pant, 'The Cognitive Status of Caste in Colonial Ethnography: A Review of the Literature on the Northwest Provinces and Awadh', *Indian Economic and Society History Review,* vol. 24 (2), 1987, p. 148.

52. Quoted in 'Caste of the Bombay Presidency', *Indian Antiquary,* vol. 2, 1873, p. 154.

53. W.W. Hunter, ed., *The Imperial Gazetteer of India,* 2 edn, 9 vols: vol. 3, London, 1885, pp. 50–1.

54. *The Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, Kolhapur District*, vol. 24, Bombay, 1886, p. 65.

55. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India,* 3 edn, Calcutta, 1908, p. 302.

56. H.H. Risley, *The Imperial Gazetteer of India,* Calcutta, 1885, quoted in R.V. Russell, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India,* London, 1916, p. 201.

57. R.E. Enthoven, *The Tribes and Castes of Bombay,* Bombay, 1920, p. xv.

58. Ibid., p. xviii.

59. Russell, *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces*, p. 43.

60. Ibid., p. 201.

61. *Census of India, Central Provinces,* vol. 12, Calcutta, 1891, p. 165.

62. *Census of India, Bombay Presidency,* vol. 8, Calcutta, 1901, p. 184.

63. Ibid., p. 183.

64. *Census of India, Central Provinces,* vol. 12, Delhi, 1911, p. 152.

65. Enthoven uses extensively a Marathi pamphlet *Kshatravanshsagur* (Ocean of Kshatriya Families) 'published by a Maratha of high birth' called Mr. Patankar, Enthoven, *Tribes and Castes of Bombay,* vol. III, p. 23. I have been unable to locate this tract itself, but it appears to be quite similar to the kind of literature being produced in the 1920s and 1930s by conservative Marathas like K.B. Deshmukh.

66. Cf. Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History,* New Delhi, 1997. Sarkar argues persuasively that it is important to recognize that this skilful borrowing of colonial discourses reflects not simply the agency of the colonised, but also elite attempts

to perpetuate the very real inequalities that existed within Indian society along the lines of caste and gender.

67. V.K. Rajwade (1863–1926) was the pioneer of a modern, nationalist historiography of the Maratha. Between 1898 and 1920 he collected and published, at great personal expense, 20 volumes of original sources from the Maratha administrative record *Marathaanchya Itihasachi Sadhana* (Sources of Maratha History). He wrote extensively on history and language, but it was his pronouncements on Brahman social leadership and superiority in Maratha history that became the most controversial. Rajwade's collected works are now available in *Itihasacarya V.K Rajavade Samagra Sahitya* (The Collected Works of V.K. Rajwade), 13 vols, 1995–98.

68. See in particular the articles 'The Skin-colour of Aryans in India', 'Our Puranas and the New Discoveries in Assyria', 'Then who are the Brahmans?' and 'The Inclusion of non-Hindus in Hindu Society' included in L.S. Joshi, ed., *Rajwade Lakhasangraha* (Selected Writings of Rajwade), 4 edn, New Delhi, 1992.

69. Ibid., p. 140.

70. K.S. Thackeray, *Gramanyacha Sudyanta Itihasa, Arthai, Nokarashachi Banda* (A Comprehensive History of Rebellion), Mumbai, 1919, pp. 32–3. Playwight journalist and father of the current Shiv Sena chief, Thackeray is better known as 'Prabodhankar' in Maharathra because of the popular non-Brahmin weekly *Prabodhan* he edited for many years. Although not a Satyashodhak, he spearheaded the non-Brahman critique of Brahman historiography and is famous for his sarcastic and biting language. His collected works are now available in *Prabodhankar Thackeray Samagra Vangmaya* (Collected Works of Prabodhankar Thackeray), Mumbai, 1998.

71. Wasudeo Lingoji Birze, *Who are the Marathas?,* Bombay, 1896 and *Kshatriya Ani Tyache Asitiva* (The Life of Kshatriyas), 2 edn, Bombay, 1912.

72. Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society,* p. 133.

73. This was an appeal by the Kshatrajagadguru, the Maratha priestly head instituted by Shahu, published in the *Satyavadi* newspaper in February 1931. Quoted in ibid., p. 134.

74. *Census of India, Central Province,* Calcutta, 1921, p. 147; see also *Census of India, Central Province,* Calcutta, 1931, p. 368.

75. Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Acts of Appropriation', pp. 111–12.

76. OIOC, British Library, London, Files of the Indian Delimitation Committee, Q/IDC/7, Report of the Delimitation Committee in Bombay and Sind, 1935; N.C. Surve, Deposition to the Delimitation Committee, 9 September 1935.

77. Constable, 'The Marginalization of a Dalit Race', p. 455.

78. R.M. Betham, *Marathas and Dekhani Musalmans: Compiled under the Orders of the Government of India,* Calcutta, 1908, p. 49.

79. Ibid., p. 96.

80. Constable, 'The Marginalization of a Dalit Race', p. 459.

81. 'The All India Maratha Conference', *Jagruti,* 1 March 1919.

82. Constable, 'The Marginalization of a Dalit Race', p. 459.

83. O'Hanlon, 'Acts of Appropriation', pp. 126–46.

84. MSA Mumbai, Home (Spl), 922 (2), Extract from the Bombay Presidency Weekly Letter no. 47, 27 Nov. 1937, p. 31.

85. MSA Mumbai, Home (Spl), 143-E-I, 'Non-Brahman Party', CID Weekly Report, Satara District, 31 May 1930; 800 (74) 21. Weekly Reports, Ratnagiri District (1932–34) 28 Jan. 1932; 800 (106)–D (4) Weekly Reports, Ahmednagar District, 26 Feb. 1937; 800 (74) (11) Confidential Report No. 75/1932, Dhule District; MSA Nagpur, CP Political & Military Files, Case #12, Akola District, 1941.

86. Phadke, *Keshavrao Jedhe,* p. 164. The Gandhian Congress was also able, remarkably, to win the elections to the Pune municipality at this time, and storm the stronghold of Tilakite conservative Brahmans.

87. Y.B. Chavan, *Krishnakathy Atmacharitra* (on the Banks of the Krishna, an Autobiography), vol. 1, Pune, 1984, pp. 172, 176, 229. Chavan, of humble

Maratha-Kunbi origin, joined rural politics in Satara district as a young recruit in the late 1920s and rose to prominence in the 1942 Satara struggle. He led the Bombay Congress in 1956 and became the first chief minister of the bilingual Bombay state in 1956 and also or United Maharashtra in 1960. His diplomatic skills were instrumental in negotiating a successful settlement with the Central Government over the demands for the new Maharashtra state, and he went on to serve as Minister for the Home, Defence and Finance portfolios in the 1960s.

88. A.B. Shinde, *The Parallel Government of Satara: A Phase of the Quit India Movement,* New Delhi, 1990; Gail Omvedt, 'The Satara Prati Sarkar (the Parallel Government of Satara)', in Gyanendra Pandey, ed., *The Indian Nation in 1942,* Calcutta, 1988.

89. O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology,* pp. 275–7.

Chapter 9

* Acknowledgements: This essay is part of a larger work on 'Gendering Dalits in Colonial North India'. I would like to thank the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, as it was as a Fellow there that this essay started taking shape. Earlier versions of this paper were presented in 2009 at the History Seminar Series at Jawaharlal Nehru University, in 2008 at the Feminist Pre-Conference on The Body in South Asian Feminism at the South Asia Studies Conference in Madison and the Exploring Masculinities: A South Asian Travelling Seminar in Kathmandu. I am grateful to all participants who contributed in shaping the arguments.

1. For example, Chopra, Osella, and Osella, eds, *South Asian Masculinities*; Chopra, ed., *Reframing Masculinities;* Osella and Osella, *Men and Masculinities*; Derne, *Movies, Masculinity and Modernity.*

2. Connell, *Masculinities*.

3. Nandy, *Intimate Enemy;* Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity.*

4. Bharucha, 'Dismantling Men'; Hansen, 'Recuperating Masculinity'; Pandey, *Routine Violence*.

5. Chopra, Osella, and Osella, eds, *South Asian Masculinities* acknowledged the following: 'We note with dismay, but a sense of inevitability, the absence in this

polarised picture of the Dalit (ex-untouchable) man, certainly another of the modern South Asian nation's problematic "Others", and hope to find future work addressing this lacuna', p. 4. This absence is particularly visible in historical studies in India. Some recent anthropological works have provided an important corrective. See Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery, *Degrees Without Freedom?;* Rogers, 'Modernity, "Authenticity", and Ambivalence'; Anandhi, Jeyaranjan, and Krishnan, 'Work, Caste and Competing Masculinities'. However, these works focus on contemporary settings. There have been significant works on black masculinity, which have pointed to similar tensions. For example, Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, pp. 181–212; Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents*; Wallace, *Constructing the Black Masculine*.

6. Scholars have argued that in British India, notions of caste substantially changed. Colonial administrators, ethnographic accounts and census helped in epitomising caste as the essence of Indian society. Attempts to describe, categorise and simplify the social complexity of local manners and customs of various castes and *jatis* often led to upholding of textual law, assisting in making society more caste-bound and 'Brahmanic' in character. See Cohn, *Anthropologist among Historians,* pp. 224–54; Dirks, *Hollow Crown*; Dirks, *Castes of Mind;* Inden, *Imagining India,* pp. 56–66; However, the British were not the paramount agents for perpetuating caste, which had much deeper roots as a social structure in India. Moreover, Indian polemicists too identified caste as a topic of vital concern for the modern nation. See Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics,* pp. 25–96, 144–86; Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India,* pp. 17–20; Sarkar, *Writing Social History,* pp. 358–90; Dube, ed., *Caste in History*.

7. Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision*; Dube, *Untouchable Pasts*.

8. Gooptu, *Politics of the Urban Poor,* pp. 27–65; Hoey, *Monograph on Trade and Manufactures in Northern India,* p. 25; Lynch, *Politics of Untouchability.*

9. Clayton, *Preachers in Print*.

10. Lucas, *History of the North Indian Christian Tract and Book Society,* p. 3; Griswold, Village Evangelization.

11. *A Descriptive & Classified Catalogue of Hindi Christian Literature,* pp. 1–41; *Report of the Christian Literature Society,* pp. 1–5.

12. Sharma, *Christian Missions in North India,* p. 92. Webster, *Dalit Christians*; Nevill, *Pilibhit*, p. 97.

13. Cohn, *Anthropologist,* p. 384.

14. Neale, *Economic Change in Rural India,* p. 21; Mayer, 'Inventing Village Tradition'.

15. Pai, *Agrarian Revolutions in Uttar Pradesh.*

16. Amin, *Sugarcane and Sugar in Gorakhpur.*

17. *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India, Vol. VII,* pp. 388–91.

18. Singh, *Depressed Classes*, pp. 23, 29, 38; Chaturvedi, *Rural Wages in the United Provinces*, p. 50.

19. *Royal (Whitley) Commission,* pp. 138–9. For changes in the rural economy and conditions of the poor in UP, see Siddiqi, *Agrarian Change in a Northern Indian State*; Whitcombe, *Agrarian Conditions in Northern India*; Jafri, *History and Status of Landlords and Tenants in UP.*

20. Pandey, 'Economic Dislocation in Nineteenth-Century Eastern UP', pp. 89–129; Shilberrad, *Monograph on Cotton Fabrics Produced in NWP,* p. 45.

21. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars,* pp. 427–30; idem, *Empire and Information*, p. 338.

22. *Royal (Whitley) Commission,* p. 133; *Report of the Department of Industries in UP, 1935–36.*

23. Gooptu, *Politics of Urban Poor.*

24. On Chamars of UP, see Briggs, *Chamars*; Cohn, *Anthropologist*, pp. 255–319; Lynch, *Politics of Untouchability;* Khare, *Untouchable as Himself.*

25. Knorringa, 'Artisan Labour in the Agra Footwear Industry'; Roy, *Traditional Industry in the Economy of Colonial India,* pp. 158, 197.

26. Walton, *Monograph on Tanning and Working in Leather in UP*, pp. 25–8; Blunt, *Caste System of Northern India*, p. 237; Briggs, *Chamars,* pp. 226–9; Nevill,

Cawnpore, pp. 104, 117.

27. Bayly, *Rulers*, pp. 340, 445.

28. For a powerful statement on the relationship between Dalits and modernity, see Rao, *The Caste Question.*

29. Sarkar, *Writing*, pp. 358–90.

30. Wiser and Wiser, *Behind the Mud Walls*; Lynch, *Politics of Untouchability;* Juergensmeyer, *Religion and Social Vision*; Cohn, Anthropologist.

31. *Census of India, 1931, UP,* pp. 554–6.

32. Gooptu, *Politics of the Urban Poor,* pp. 154–75; Ramnarayan S. Rawat, 'A Social History of "Chamars" in Uttar Pradesh, 1881–1956', unpublished PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Delhi, 2004, Chapter 4.

33. Ahmad, 'Caste Mobility Movements'; Carroll, 'Colonial Perceptions of Indian Society; idem, 'Caste, Social Change, and the Social Scientist'.

34. Bayly, 'Hindu Modernisers and the "Public" Arena', pp. 93–137.

35. Trautman, *Aryans and British India;* Leopold, 'Aryan Theory of Race in India'.

36. Jordens, *Swami Shraddhananda,* p. 137.

37. Malhotra, *Gender, Caste and Religious Identities*, pp. 2–3.

38. Sarkar, *Writing*, pp. 186–215.

39. 'Samaj Sudhar', *Sudha,* April 1929, p. 318; Sharma, *Achchut Mimansa,* pp. 1–11; Laata, *Brahman Sudhar,* pp. 4–7; Narayan, *Bhajan Gaurakha Gopal Darpan*, p. 23; Sharma, *Kaliyug mein Satyug*, p. 12.

40. For various constructions of masculinity in colonial India, see, for example, Nandy, *Intimate Enemy,* pp. 1–63; Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity;* Sengupta, *Frail Hero and Virile History,* pp. 120–49; Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform,* pp. 172–206; Alter, *Wrestler's Body*; McClintock, *Imperial Leather*.

41. Malik, *Orient and Occident,* p. 183; Nandy, *Intimate Enemy;* Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*.

42. Nevill, *Badaun,* p. 72; idem, *Pilibhit,* p. 89; idem, *Shahjahanpur,* p. 19; Neave, *Farrukhabad,* pp. 69, 85.

43. Phelps, *Final Settlement Report on the Bulandshahr District*, p. 10.

44. *Chand,* July 1939, pp. 189–92.

45. Gaurishankar Singh Chandail, 'Hindu Bhangi', *Chand,* June 1934, pp. 145–9.

46. 'Dalit Samudaya ki Arthik Samasya', *Chand,* January 1940, pp. 133–4.

47. Ganga Prasad Upadhyaya, 'Samaj Sudhar', *Sudha,* July 1929, p. 665. Also see Upadhyaya, ed., *Dalitodhar,* p. 11.

48. Sharma, *Hinduon ki Unnati aur Achchut*, p. 24.

49. Prasad, *Bhaichara*, p. 8. Also see, Shivnarayan, *Bahishkrit Bharat*.

50. *The Depressed Classes of India,* p. 31.

51. *Annual Report of the Presiding Elder.* My emphasis.

52. Johnson, *Jati Pariksha,* p. 8. Also see Khan, *Jati ki Chut Chat.*

53. Dyer, *White*; Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*; Perry, *Shades of White*.

54. Crooke, *Tribes and Castes,* p. 261.

55. Sherring, *Hindu Tribes and Castes, Vol. I,* p. 401.

56. North Indian Christian Tract and Book Society, *Jati Pati ka Varnan*, p. 3.

57. Cecil, *Indian Village Crimes*.

58. For details, see Frietag, 'Crime in the Social Order of Colonial North India'; Yang, 'Dangerous Castes and Tribes'; Nigam, 'Disciplining and Policing the "Criminals by Birth", Part I', pp. 131–64; Nigam, 'Disciplining and Policing the "Criminals by Birth", Part II'; Mayaram, 'Criminality or Community?';

Radhakrishnan, *Dishonoured by History;* Kumar, 'Relationship of Caste and Crime'.

59. Singha, *Despotism of Law,* pp. 37–46.

60. For a detailed analysis of this, see Rawat, 'A Social History of "Chamars,"' Chapter 1. Also see, Indian Police Collection, Mss Eur F161/154, 'Forms of Crime', Oriental and India Office Collections (hereafter OIOC).

61. Crooke, *Tribes and Castes, Vol. I*, p. 190.

62. F. 154 (C)/Box 27, February 1900, Judicial [Criminal] Department, Uttar Pradesh State Archives (hereafter UPSA).

63. Rawat, 'A Social History of "Chamars"'.

64. Nevill, *Pilibhit*, p. 131.

65. Hollins, *The Criminal Tribes of the United Provinces,* pp. 92–4. Also see Yang, 'Dangerous Castes and Tribes'.

66. 42–8/November 1916, Jails, A, Home Dept, National Archives of India (hereafter NAI).

67. 291–302/June 1900, Public, A, Home Dept, NAI.

68. Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community*.

69. Hoch, *White Hero, Black Beast*; Hernton, *Sex and Racism*, p. 19.

70. Tirathram, *Striyon ko Chetavni,* p. 12.

71. Vaishya, *Narayani Shiksha,* p. 285.

72. 'Samaj ki Chingariyan', *Chand,* November 1927, pp. 151–2.

73. 'Achchut', *Chand,* August 1934, pp. 352–9.

74. 'Bal Patniyon ke Aasoon', *Chand,* March 1927, pp. 460–1.

75. A lot has been written on the epic. Sir George Abraham Grierson, an oriental scholar and superintendent of the Linguistic Survey of India from 1898 to 1902,

wrote extensively on it. See for example his translations and edited versions of the epic—*The Lay of Alha;* 'The Lay of Brahma's Marriage'; 'The Song of Alha's Marriage'. Also see Grierson Collection, Mss Eur E223/15, OIOC.

76. See Sir Charles Elliot's notes on the customs of the epic, Mss Eur E223/15(ii), OIOC.

77. Vipinbihari Trivedi, 'Lok Katha ke Nayak Alha Udal', *Vishal Bharat,* 45 (3), March 1950, pp. 193–6.

78. Lynch, 'Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Myth and Charisma', p. 107.

79. Pinch, *Peasants and Monks;* Gooptu, *Politics of the Urban Poor;* Michelutti, *Vernacularisation of Democracy.*

80. See, for example, Longer, *Forefront Forever;* Basham, *Untouchable Soldiers;* Constable, 'Marginalization of a Dalit Martial Race'; Cohen, 'The Untouchable Soldier'; Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy.*

81. Orme, *History of Military Transactions of the British Nation.*

82. Constable, 'Marginalization of a Dalit Martial Race'.

83. F/4/260/5780, Board's Collections: 1808–9, OIOC.

84. L/MIL/7/7236, OIOC.

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid

87. Ibid.

88. See L/MIL/14/216, OIOC; L/MIL/7/12141, OIOC.

89. Basham, *Untouchable Soldiers*, pp. 28–9; Cohen, 'Untouchable Soldier', p. 458.

90. Singha, 'Finding Labor from India for the War in Iraq'. Also see 42–8/November 1916, Jails, A, Home Deptt, NAI, 'Recruitment of convict sweepers for service in Mesopotamia'; 5/May 1916, Police, Home Dept, NAI.

91. 6–7/June 1913, Police, A, Home Dept, NAI.

92. 42–8/November 1916, Jails, A, Home Dept, NAI.

93. Deshpande, 'Hopes and Disillusionment', pp. 180–3.

94. 'Harijan aur Sainik Seva', *Chand,* July 1939, p. 200.

95. *(Secret) Police Abstracts of Intelligence of UP Government, 1922–40* (hereafter *PAI),* 24 February 1940, No. 8, Para 71, p. 42.

96. L/PJ/10/14, OIOC. Also see, Banshidhar, *Kshatriya Shilpkar Darpan,* p. 59.

97. Singha, 'Finding Labor from India for the War in Iraq', pp. 443–4.

98. L/PJ/10/14, OIOC.

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid.

101. 'Shilpkar Soldiers', *Pioneer,* 1 August 1942.

102. L/PJ/10/14, OIOC; L/PJ/8/685, OIOC; 'Depressed Classes Urged to Enlist', *Pioneer*, 18 January 1942; *Pioneer,* Lucknow, 25 February 1942; *Samta*, 25 February 1942; Poster in Hindi titled 'UP Adi Hind Mahasabha ke kuch Pramukh Padadhikari', available in L/PJ/10/14, OIOC.

103. *Report of the Adi Hindu DC Kumbh Mela Conference,* pp. 3–4.

104. Similar idioms were used in different contexts by prisoners labouring on public works under the British. See Singha, *Despotism of Law*, pp. 274–5.

105. 105–105/January 1860, Foreign Consultation, Foreign Dept, NAI.

106. L/PJ/8/685, OIOC.

107. Pasi, *Pasi Samaj,* p. 3; Risalsingh, *Pasi Panchayat,* pp. 4–5.

108. 'Bhangiyon wali Taup', *Madhuri,* 1 (4), November 1923, p. 419.

109. 'Asprishyon mein Jagriti', *Chand,* February 1930, p. 775. Intermediate castes too were making similar claims. For example, see Nathuprasad Yadav, 'British

Shasan Kal Mein Yadavon ki Fauji Unnati ka Itihas', *Yadavesh,* 1 (2), 1935, pp. 21–8.

110. Pinch, *Peasants and Monks,* pp. 81–114.

111. Gooptu, *Politics of the Urban Poor,* pp. 185–243.

112. Raghuvanshi, *Chanvar Puran;* Banshidhar, *Kshatriya Shilpkar Darpan;* Pasi, *Pasi Samaj;* Sadhu, *Nishadvanshavali*; Mishra, *Dharuka Kshatriya Vanshavali;* Sagar, *Yadav Jivan;* Yadvendu, *Yaduvansh ka Itihas.*

113. Banshidhar, *Kshatriya Shilpkar Darpan,* pp. 65–7.

114. Raghuvanshi, *Chanvar Puran,* Introduction.

115. *Oudh Gazetteer,* II, p. 207. Also see Risalsingh, *Pasi Panchayat.*

116. *Report of the Special Session of the All India Adi-Hindu (Depressed Classes) Conference*, p. 3.

117. Pasi, *Pasi Samaj,* p. 6.

118. Raghuvanshi, *Chanvar Puran,* pp. 46–7.

119. Dudink et al., eds, *Masculinities in Politics and War.*

120. Pai, *Dalit Assertion,* p. 32.

121. Singh, *Depressed Classes,* pp. 47, 109–24.

122. *Report of the Special Session of the All India Adi-Hindu (Depressed Classes) Conference*, p. 4.

123. L/PJ/8/685, OIOC.

124. Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* pp. 198–311.

125. Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents,* p. 2.

126. Rao, *The Caste Question.*

127. *PAI*, 27 October 1923, No. 41, Para 687, p. 532.

128. Sharda, *Dalitodhar*, p. 10.

129. Gooptu, *Politics of the Urban Poor*.

130. Sharda, *Dalitodhar*, p. 14.

131. Crooke, *Tribes and Castes,* p. clvi.

132. Johnson, *Hindu Dharma ke Phal*, p. 6. Also see, Johnson, *Jotdar ka Brittant*.

133. Phillips, *Outcastes Hope*, p. 83.

134. These cartoons were repeatedly published in many other newspapers and magazines of the time, highlighting a broad consensus and opposition to conversions of outcastes. See, for example, various issues of *Chand; Vyanga Chitravali; Abhyudaya,* 13 March 1926, p. 9.

135. *Vyanga Chitravali*.

136. *Vyanga Chitravali.*

137. Forrester, *Caste and Christianity,* pp. 74–5, 77, 81.

138. Menon, *Blindness of Insight.*

139. *PAI*, 1 April 1922, No. 13, Para 416, p. 642; PAI, 13 May 1922, No. 18, Para 573, p. 845.

140. *PAI,* 30 September 1922, No. 38, Para 1193, p. 1466.

141. *PAI,* 4 November 1922, No. 42, Para 1269, p. 1577.

142. Raghuvanshi, *Chanvar Puran;* Briggs, *Chamars,* p. 47; Lynch, *Politics,* pp. 174–81; Cohn, *Anthropologist,* p. 272.

143. *PAI*, 24 March 1923, No. 12, Para 247, p. 186.

144. *Abhyudaya*, 25 December 1926, p. 8.

145. *PAI,* 29 September 1923, No. 38, Para 660, p. 503.

146. Blunt, *Caste,* p. 241.

147. Gender has only recently emerged as an integral part of studies on intermediate and lower castes. Various scholars have emphasised how women were used to counter their social marginalisation. See Lynch, *Politics;* Cohn, *Anthropologist,* pp. 255–98; Bandyopadhyay, 'From Alienation to Integration'; Dube, *Untouchable Pasts.* For views on how women in turn asserted themselves, see Searle-Chatterjee, *Reversible Sex Roles;* Jogdand, ed., *Dalit Women in India;* Jain et al., *Scheduled Caste Women;* Thiruchandran, *Ideology, Caste, Class and Gender;* Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste*; Chowdhry, *Contentious Marriages, Eloping Couples*; Rao, ed., *Gender and Caste;* Rege, *Writing Caste/Writing Gender.*

148. Rao, *The Caste Question.*

Chapter 10

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1. Rashbihari Roy Pandit, *Namasudra Darpan I* (Calcutta, 1316/1909), 176 pp., Re. 1.00.

2. Ibid., pp. 160–76. Roy Pandit exaggerated the number slightly: the 1901 Bengal Census Report estimated the population of the people it described as 'Namasudras or Chandals' as 1.86 million. In Bengal proper, they were the third biggest caste grouping, after the Mahishyas *(c.* 2.5 million) and Rajbansis (around 2 million). *Census 1901, Volume VI (Bengal),* pp. 391, 395–6. Located in the south-central, southwestern, and northern parts of the province, respectively, Namasudras, Mahishyas, and Rajbansis developed the three major caste-movements of early twentieth-century Bengal.

3. There had been quite a vogue for a *'darpan* literature in Bengal in the 1860s and 1870s, stimulated by Dinabandhu Mitra's famous play *Neel darpan* (1860). The authors then had all been high caste. Roy Pandit's tract, and numerous other similarly titled lower-caste pamphlets in the early twentieth century, represented a subordinate-caste entry into a bhadralok literary genre.

4. Kaviraj Sashikumar Baroibiswas, *Namasudra-Dwijatattva* (Namasudras as Twice-Born; Village Maluhar, Post Office Iluhar, Swarupkhati, Barisal, April 1911;

104pp., Re. 1.00), p. 71.

5. *Namasudra Darpan,* p.3. 'Bhadralok', lit. the genteel or polite folk, is the term used generically, in the main, for the three castes mentioned by Roy Pandit, connoting by the late nineteenth century a combination of high-caste status, education, and respectability grounded in aloofness from manual labour.

6. As Sekhar Bandyopadhyay has pointed out in his recent valuable study, 'Chandal' was probably no more than a generic term used by their social superiors to refer to a wide variety of lower-caste people. Those described as Chandal—and later as Namasudras—in the Census and other colonial accounts fell into no less than twenty-nine endogamous groups, according to H.H. Risley's *Tribes and Castes of Bengal* (1891). Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal, 1872–1947* (Richmond, 1997), pp. 19–20, and *passim*.

7. As I have suggested in an earlier essay, the classified catalogue of printed tracts in Bengali at the India Office Library (now part of the British Library) can provide a rough indicator of this sharp upturn during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Only 24 titles are listed under the 'Castes and Tribes' rubric for the entire period till 1905; the years from 1905 to 1920 include 140, a very large proportion of them written by, or in support of, lower-caste claims. Entries after 1920 are not classified in this manner, but one does get a strong impression that the volume of caste tracts starts diminishing from somewhere around the mid 1920s. See my 'Identity and Difference: Caste in the Formation of Ideologies of Nationalism and Hindutva', in *Writing Social History* (Delhi, 1997), p. 376.

8. Indologists with their textual focus had tended to equate caste with unchanging varna, whereas social anthropology, following M.N. Srinivas, visualised jatis capable of moving up or down a fixed, hierarchical ladder. In both types of approaches, however, the entities being studied, varna or jati, were assumed as more or less given or constant.

9. For a particularly clear instance, see Michael Moffat, *An Untouchable Community in South India: Structure and Consensus* (Princeton, 1979).

10. I have elaborated this assessment-cum-critique in my *Writing Social History,* chapter 3.

11. Partha Chatterjee, 'Caste and Subaltern Consciousness', in Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies VI* (Delhi, 1989). Chatterjee's chapter, 'The Nation and Its Outcastes', in his *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Delhi, 1994), was largely an elaboration of this article. The same *Subaltern Studies* volume, incidentally, included an essay of mine, also dealing in significant part with caste: it is evident, I think, at least with hindsight, that I had there already started moving out of this dichotomous model. 'The Kalki-Avatar of Bikrampur: A Village Scandal in Early-Twentieth-Century Bengal', *Subaltern Studies VI,* op. cit.

12. I am thinking particularly of Ronald Inden's *Imagining India* (Oxford, 1990), and the recent work of Nick Dirks. Dirks, to his credit, seems at times to recognise the political dangers of extreme colonial constructivism in the context of high-caste backlashes against attempts at subordinate-caste affirmations: see his 'Recasting Tamil Society: The Politics of Caste and Race in Contemporary South India', in C.J. Fuller, ed., *Caste Today* (Delhi, 1996).

13. Bengal appears particularly appropriate for such a study of shifts across time. Common sense today would consider West Bengal to be possibly the one region of India where the articulation of caste in formal politics has so far remained minimal, in total contrast to the notoriety, in this respect, of Bihar. Yet the 1901 Bengal Census Report of G.A. Gait had categorically stated that 'with scarcely an exception . . . claims to higher caste, or to new and more pretentious names, are confined to Bengal proper.' Eleven out of thirteen claims that Gait discussed in the section of his Report entitled 'Disputed Points of Social Precedence' came from Bengal—as against only Babhans and Kurmis from the Bihari-speaking districts of Bengal Presidency. *Bengal Census Report, 1901,* pp. 384, 378–84. This confirms the impression one gets from catalogues of caste tracts—see n. 7 above.

14. Pradip Kumar Datta, *Carving Blocs: Communal Ideologies in Early Twentieth-century Bengal* (Delhi, 1999), p. 9. Datta goes on to argue that 'A different range of possibilities emerge once communal formations are seen as part of a field in which they have to perforce relate to other collective identities (other than its binary in "Hindu" or "Muslim") such as class, gender or caste affiliations. For what we then behold are the vulnerabilities of that identity, the ways in which its "hardness" has to mediate, compromise, inflect and suppress in order to produce tentative unities that proclaim themselves to be bounded monoliths' (pp. 9–10)

15. I am using seven Namasudra tracts, but have seen, for instance, around fifteen Mahishya pamphlets in the collections at the National Library (Calcutta) and the India Office Library (British Library, London): in both cases, of course, a necessarily random sampling.

16. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India*, op. cit.

17. L.S.S. O'Malley, *Report on Bengal, Bihar Orissa and Sikkim, Census 1911,* volume v, part I, p. 440.

18. E.A. Gait's Notes of 31 May and 14 June 1911, Risley Collection, MSS/Eur.E. 295/11.

19. See my 'Many Worlds of Indian History', in *Writing Social History,* pp. 22–3.

20. Gerald Sider takes issue with Hobsbawm and Ranger's very influential edited volume, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983) for its failure to 'address traditions that are invented "from below"'. I have found Sider's study of the shifting identity claims, internal fissures, and varied productions of history of an American Indian community in North Carolina methodologically illuminating and at times almost startlingly appropriate for my present study. Gerald M. Sider, *Lumbee Indian Histories: Race, Ethnicity, and Indian Identity in the Southern United States* (Cambridge, 1993). The quotation comes from p. 291 of this book.

21. Lucy Carroll, 'Colonial Perceptions of Indian Society and the Emergence of Caste Associations', *Journal of Asian Studies,* February 1978.

22. Thus, those called 'Chandals' before the 1891 Census were designated as 'Namasudra or Chandal' in 1891, 'Namasudra (Chandal)' in 1901, and 'Namasudras' only from 1911 onwards. *Faridpur District Gazetteer* (Calcutta, 1925), p. 47. It should be noted, however, that officials were generally quite unsympathetic to most such claims, and at times seemed to speak the language of high-caste contempt. Thus E.A. Gait as Bengal Census Commissioner rejected the vast majority of claims in 1901, while his successor L.S.S. O'Malley in 1911 dismissed the petitions of some Namasudras to be considered as Brahmans as 'extraordinary . . . Thus do the pretensions of the low castes grow.' *Census 1901, Volume Vl.i* (Bengal), Disputed Points of Social Precedence, pp. 378–84; *Census 1911, Volume V.i* (Bengal), p. 445.

[23.] Mahananda Haldar's *Sri Sri Guruchand Charit* (Khulna, 1943), the 600-page biography in verse of the second leader of the Matua sect that played a key role in the Namasudra movement, does give the 1911 Census some space (pp. 238–59)—but only as one incident in a detailed, roughly chronological, and very long account.

[24.] *Faridpur District Gazetteer,* op. cit., p. 47.

[25.] Report of W.L. Owen, District Superintendent of Police, to District Magistrate, Faridpur, No. 66, Camp Bhanga, 18 March 1873: Government of Bengal, Judicial Proceedings, March 1873, n. 179.

[26.] A secular decline in agricultural prices set in after *c.* 1925, to be followed of course by the Depression. Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1919–1947* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 46, 63–4.

[27.] For a pioneering account of what he has termed a literature of improvement, particularly of rural Muslim origin, see Pradip Kumar Datta, *Carving Blocs,* chapter 2.

[28.] A British account dated 1852 described them as 'fish-sellers, ploughmen, coolies and slaves', but the 1911 Census found 77.94% of Namasudras engaged in agricultural occupations. These were further subdivided into 95.71% tenant farmers, 1.15% rent receivers, and 3.56% field labourers. Cited in Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, op. cit., pp. 20–1. The possibility of cross-cutting between these categories of course makes all such apparently exact statistics somewhat dubious, but the Namasudras do seem to have become, rather than always been, a predominantly settled peasant caste-group in course of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

[29.] *Faridpur District Gazetteer,* pp. 4, 33, 47; *Sri Sri Guruchand Charit*, pp. 61–6, 92–8.

[30.] Ibid., pp. 21, 27.

[31.] Kazi Shahidulla, *Pathshalas into Schools* (Calcutta, 1987), pp. 15, 23, 29, 33.

[32.] The corresponding statistics for the three high castes, normally taken to constitute the Bengali 'bhadralok', in 1911 were: Baidyas 53.2% in Bengali, 20.88%

in English, Brahman 39.9% and 10.9%; Kayasthas 30.9% and 9.8%. Cited in Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Politics and the Raj: Bengal 1872–1937* (Calcutta, 1990), p. 109.

33. Thus in the 67 vernacular schools in Murshidabad district that Adam surveyed in his 1838 Report, there were 39 Kayastha and 14 Brahman teachers, as against 13 others, including even a solitary Chandal. Of 998 Hindu students, Brahmans numbered 181, Kayasthas 129, and Vaidyas 14. The remaining two-thirds were distributed among no less than 47 castes, including 4 Chandals. William Adam, *Reports on the State of Education in Bengal, 1835 and 1838,* ed. Anathnath Basu (Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1941), pp. 228, 231.

34. Hitesranjan Sanyal, *Social Mobility in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1981), pp. 38–41, 71–4, and *passim.*

35. Records of such decisions—but not the accompanying discussions—survive in some abundance in Peshwa-ruled eighteenth-century Maharashtra, as the late Hiroshi Fukazawa showed in a famous essay: 'The State and the Caste System (Jati)', in H. Fukazawa, *The Medieval Deccan: Peasants, Social Systems and States, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Delhi, 1991).

36. I find Chris Bayly's virtual equation of the pre-print 'Indian ecumene' with something like a Habermasian public sphere one of the few problematic features of a very fine study of pre- and early-colonial social communications. C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge, 1996), chapter 5. For more nuanced applications of Habermas, see Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (New Delhi, 2001), chapter 2 and *passim.*

37. 'Brahman Jati', *Prabahini,* 6 Chaitra 1320/1914, reprinted in Brajendranath Bandopadhyay and Sajanikanta Das, *Panchkori Bandopadhyayer Rachanabali,* volume ii (Calcutta, 1951), pp. 67–70.

38. Sirajuddoulah, the last independent Muslim ruler of Bengal prior to the British conquest, generally had a reputation of great cruelty among nineteenth-century Bengali Hindu writers. Guru Umeshchandra Datta Gupta, *Jatimala Sar Sangraha* (Naldha, Fakirhat, Khulna, November 1913). We shall shortly encounter several examples of the multiple uses of the Parashuram legend. For an early

instance from Maharashtra, in 1830, see Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflictandldeology* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 24–34.

39. Thus Kaviraj Sashikumar Baroibiswas's *Namasudra-Dwijatattva* claimed to have been revised by a pandit knowing Sanskrit, Srinath Haldar. It also acknowledged help from Madhusudan Sarkar, secretary of a local Kayastha Sabha.

40. But see Tanika Sarkar, 'A Sudra Father for Our Lord: Balakdashis and the Making of Caste, Sect and Community in Modern Bengal', *Studies in History,* 16.i, n.s., 2000.

41. Such castes were *ajalchal:* water, or cooked food which would require the use of water, served or prepared by them would pollute the higher caste, but not their touch. Below them were the *antyajas*, whose touch polluted, and who were not served even by Varna Brahmans. For a clear summary of the early-twentieth-century Bengal caste structure, see Hitesranjan Sanyal, *Social Mobility in Bengal,* op. cit., pp. 36–8.

42. For two instances of orthodox complaints that degenerate or corrupt Brahmans were selling the pass, so to say, see the speech by one of the biggest landlords of Bengal, Brojendrakishore Raychaudhuri, at the inaugural meeting of the Brahman Sabha in Calcutta in March 1911: Bangiya Brahman Sabha, *Brahman Sabhaye Bakrita* (Calcutta, May 1911), and the almost exactly contemporary tract written by an obscure village Brahman: Chintaharan Chattopadhyay, *Brahman* (Faridpur, January 1911). In Satyajit Ray's film *Pather Panchali,* the desperately poor Brahman villager Harihar tries at one stage to raise funds by giving some lower-caste men the sacred thread that is the marker of 'twice-born', high-caste status.

43. See, for instance, Trailokyanath Haldar, *Mahishya o Mahishyayaji Gouradya Brahman Parichay* (Khari, 24 Parganas, January 1911); Sudarshanchandra Biswas, *Bangiya Mahishya Purohit* (Habashpur, Faridpur, October 1912); and Harishchandra Chakrabarti, *Bhranti Vijay* (Andul, Howrah, June 1912). The last constitutes exceptionally detailed affirmation of the claims of Mahishya Brahmans, with reference to a large number of specific cases of alleged injustice.

44. Petition of the Dacca District Namasudra Jajak Brahman Association to the Viceroy, 26 June 1946, Government of India Reforms Office, File No. 115/46-R,

cited in Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity,* op. cit., p. 252, fn. 37.

45. Sukumari Bhattacharji, *Literature in the Vedic Age* (Calcutta, 1984), pp. 46–7; Hitesranjan Sanyal, *Social Mobility in Bengal*, op. cit., pp. 13–14.

46. Niharranjan Ray, *Bangalir Itihas: Adiparva* (Calcutta, 1949, 1980), pp. 267–8. Like Georges Duby many years later on the feudal schema of the three orders, this remarkable book argued by implication that classificatory schema are ideological projects formulated by specific groups; they have some connections with social conditions when they are effective, but not any one-to-one correspondence. Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined* (Paris, 1978; Chicago, 1980), pp. 8–9.

47. Ray, pp. 269–72. We shall see shortly that the figure of Ballal Sen came in very handy in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century in a number of varied projects of caste mobility.

48. Another striking feature of the account of various groups coming to 'Gujarat', the town newly founded by Kalketu—where this caste list is located—is that the description begins with Muslims, who are subdivided similarly into occupational groups. 'Kavikankan' Mukundaram Chakrabarti, *Chandi*; *c.* 1570s–1590s (first printed in Battala, Calcutta, 1820; Basumati, Calcutta, n.d.), pp. 68–72.

49. I find it difficult to accept Gyan Prakash's assessment, in a case study of the Bhuinyas of Bihar, that the pollution clichés in their origin myths indicate an insertion of the 'historical' and 'cultural' into the 'natural': 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a Bhuinya.' Prakash equates high-caste theories of origin entirely with the Purusha myth. But the notion of debased origin through human error or violation is very much present also in the Brahmanical theory of varna-sankara. Gyan Prakash, 'Becoming a Bhuinya: Oral Traditions nad Contested Domination in Eastern India', in Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash, eds, *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia* (Delhi 1991), pp. 147, 158. For a similar critique, see Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity,* op. cit., p. 45.

50. Obvious examples would include Dravidian or Tamil counter-myths; Phule on Marathas as the original peasant-warriors of Maharashtra; assumed to be a region conquered unjustly by Aryan-Brahman invaders from the North; and the plethora

of 'Ad'-movements among subordinated caste groups in early-twentieth-century India. The striking exception is Ambedkar: see his *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables?* (Delhi, 1948), where he tries to explain the Hindu/Untouchable divide not by racial or even occupational difference, but in terms of a combination of uneven transitions from nomadic pastoral life to settled agriculture, and the subordination of groups that had remained loyal longer to Buddhism.

51. Thus Bhattacharya reduces the question of caste antipathy to an occasional 'little hitch', and has nothing but contempt for 'low-caste parvenus' who aspire to higher status. Jogendranath Bhattacharya, *Hindu Castes and Sects* (Calcutta, 1896; rpt. 1968), pp. 3–4.

52. Ibid., pp. 4, 10, 11.

53. For some details, see below, as well as my *Many Worlds of Indian History,* in *Writing Social History,* pp. 26–30.

54. Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (California, 1997).

55. *Bengal Census Report, 1872,* volume v, chapter v; *Census 1931,* volume v.i, Bengal and Sikkim Report, p. 421.

56. H.H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal/Ethnographic Glossary* (Calcutta, 1891; rpt. 1981), p. xv.

57. Ibid., p. xix.

58. *Bengal Census Report (1901),* volume VI.i, p. 347.

59. Risley referred in 1891 explicitly to the 'political value [that] may attach to the demonstration that a given population is or is not composed of homogeneous ethnic elements . . .' Ibid., p. 20. Ten years later, as Census Commissioner of India, he argued that 'race sentiment' supplied 'the motive principle of caste', animating its sense of hierarchy. Anthropometry for Risley had become a dogma, with caste hierarchy corresponding to the gradation from the 'finest' to the 'coarsest' nose: 'The status of the members of a particular group varies in inverse ratio to the mean relative width of their noses.' *Census of India 1901,* volume i.i (H.H. Risley's Report), pp. 489, 498.

60. Thus E.A. Gait in his report on Bengal in 1901 tried to combine a somewhat toned-down version of Risley's race theory with elements from Nesfield's stress on the occupational basis of caste. Artisanal castes, he suggested, may have had their roots in 'guilds' that 'gradually hardened into endogamous groups.' *Bengal Census Report* (1901), volume vi .i, pp. 359, 361.

61. Rev. M.A. Sherring, *Hindu Tribes and Castes,* volume iii (London, 1881; Delhi, 1974), pp. 220–35, and *passim.*

62. Risley (1891), pp. xcii–xciii. What made this sympathy particularly significant was that 1891 was the year of the passing, amidst enormous controversy, of the Age of Consent Act.

63. Ibid., pp. xxv, xx.

64. Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Low-Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India* (Cambridge, 1985), chapters 3, 6.

65. Hindu Castes and Sects, op. cit., pp. 1–2, 9, and *passim.*

66. The correspondents—among them men of the stature of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Aswinikumar Dutta—were asked 'to go for their information to the persons most likely to be well informed on questions of custom, such as priests, marriage brokers, genealogists, headmen of caste panchayets, and the like.' Except for the last category, all the others would have been high caste. Risley (1891), p. xiii; Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Politics and the Raj,* op. cit., p. 33.

67. *Census Report (India),* 1901, volume i.i, p. 538; *Census Report (Bengal),* 1901, p. 354.

68. Compare, for instance, Hitesranjan Sanyal, *Social Mobility in Bengal,* op. cit., pp. 36–8 with *Bengal Census Report (1901),* pp. 367–73.

69. *Adhikari-bheda* (literally, differential rights, claims and powers) conveyed the notion of the propriety of each caste and sect having its own rituals and beliefs in an unified but hierarchically differentiated structure within which each accepted its appropriate place. It thus neatly combined catholicity with conservative

maintenance of norms appropriate to a group's location within the overall hierarchy. For more details, see my 'Identity and Difference', op. cit., pp. 368–74.

70. Thus Rammohan in 1821 had criticised *jatibheda* (caste distinction) as 'the root of all disunion', and in a letter dated 18 January 1828 argued that caste 'had entirely deprived (Indians) of patriotic feeling.' Ibid., p. 365.

71. The contrast between Vedic (or Upanishadic) times, and later degeneration, a standard assumption of much Orientalist scholarship, had already been given a central place in the arguments of reformers like Rammohan when preaching monotheism and attacking customs like sati.

72. Sibnath Shastri, *Jatibheda* (Calcutta, 1884), ed. Dilip Biswas (Calcutta, 1963), pp. 33–6, 40–9, and *passim.*

73. I was unable to find a single reference to these happenings in the weekly *Report of Native Papers (Bengal)* for January–June 1873.

74. Jogendrachandra Ghosh, *Brahmanism and the Sudra, or the Indian Labour Problem* (Calcutta, *c.* 1900), pp. 11–13; Satish Mukherjee, 'The Question of Caste', *Dawn,* August 1903. For more details, see my *Writing Social History,* pp. 27–33, 378–9.

75. *Brahman Sabhaye Baktrita,* op. cit. Examples of tracts devoted to outlining and justifying right (i.e. Brahmanical) order, sometimes collectively termed *jati-mala* literature, include the already cited *Brahman* of Chintaharan Chattopadhyay, and Pandit Asutosh Mukho padhyay's *Jati-Vigyan* (Durgapur, Post Office Joynagar, 24 Parganas, May 1915).

76. Pradip Kumar Datta, '"Dying Hindus": Production of Hindu Communal Commonsense in Early-Twentieth-Century Bengal', *Economic and Political Weekly,* 19 June 1993, and *Carving Blocs,* op. cit., chapter 1.

77. The demand for a separate electorate raised by the just founded Muslim League was granted with suspicious ease by the Morley–Minto Reforms of 1909, and there were also some gestures in the way of appointments and educational facilities extended to Namasudras and other lower castes in the new province of East Bengal and Assam that had been set up in 1905 by partitioning Bengal. In July 1910 the Gait Circular threatened to reduce sharply the number of officially

recorded 'Hindus' by siphoning off large numbers of lower castes—to which U.N. Mukherji responded with another pamphlet, *Hinduism and the Coming Census* (Calcutta, March 1911).

78. *Modern Review* (June 1909).

79. Manindranath Mandal, *Bange Digindranarayan* (Calcutta, 1927).

80. God, he argued, has given 'the same powers to all human beings, just as he has made the same sun for Brahman and Chandal.' *Jatibheda*, pp. 4–5. The title of this pamphlet itself could have been an implicit tribute to Sibnath Shastri's tract with the same name.

81. Digindranarayan Bhattacharya, *Bidhabar Nirjala Ekadashi* (Calcutta, 1926)—which targeted the custom of making widows go without water on *ekadashi* day, twice every month; ibid., *Chaturvarna Bibhaga* (Serajgunj, 1917; Calcutta, 1925), and *Nipirita Sudrer Nidrabhanga* (Calcutta, 1926).

82. In the introduction to his pamphlet entitled *Bangiya Jana Sangh/Bengal People's Association* (Khejuri, Midnapur, 1923), pp. i–ii, Manindranath recalled how U.N. Mukherji had discouraged, and Digindranarayan enthusiastically welcomed, his initial efforts to start such an organisation around 1919. He also acknowledged the help received from some Mali, Namasudra, Rajbansi, Jhalla-Malla, and Pod leaders while eventually organising the inaugural conference of his association in Calcutta on 5 February 1922.

83. Rashbihari Roy Pandit, *Namasudra Darpan* (1909), op. cit.; Kabiraj Sashikumar Baroibiswas, *Namasudra-Dwijatattva* (Barisal, April 1911), p. 104; Balaram Sarkar, *Namasudra-Jnanabhandar* (Boltoli School, Olpur, Faridpur, May 1911), p. 94; and Jadunath Majumdar, *Namasudrachar-Chandrika* (Jessore, June 1913).

84. Haridas Palit, *Bangiya PatitJatir Karmi* (Calcutta, 1915).

85. Tarakchandra Sarkar, *Sri Sri Harileelamrita* (Olpur, Faridpur, 1916; 2nd edn, Rampal, Khulna, 1924); Mahananda Haldar, *Sri Sri Guruchand- Charit* (Kalibari, Khulna, 1943).

86. Rajbansi tracts also often slip into verse: see for instance Narendranath Adhikari, *Rajbansiya Kshatriya-Samaj* (Rangpur, 1910, 1911), and Maniram Kavyabhushan, *Rajbansi-Kshatriya-Dipak* (Village Kishamat- Paharbhanga, Post Office Pharabari, Dinajpur, August 1911).

87. *Namasudra-Dwijatattva,* pp. 33–4, 36.

88. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity*, p. 42, and *passim*; Bandyopadhyay, 'Popular Religion and Social Mobility in Colonial Bengal: The Matua Sect and the Namasudras', in Rajat Ray, ed., *Mind, Body and Society: Life and Mentality in Colonial Bengal* (Calcutta, etc., 1995).

89. Balaram Sarkar, pp. 78–81.

90. The author assures us that his is a true story, only he has changed the specific names of people and places. Parts of the book read too much like a model improvement tale to be entirely believable. But the facticity of Palit's story is less relevant than the insights it can provide about one kind of lower-caste perception, imagination—and limits.

91. *Bangiya Patit Jatir Karmi*, p. 1.

92. Palit recalls how his master always had a wash after giving him a thrashing. Ibid., pp. 12–13. For a comparison of conditions with those in the Namasudra heartland of South-Central Bengal, where they were not systematically treated as completely untouchable, see Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity,* pp. 15–16.

93. Ibid., pp. 7, 56.

94. Palit here appropriates an auto-critical theme about the dasatya of chakri—bondage of clerical office-work—which had been much in vogue in some bhadralok circles from the late nineteenth century. See for instance my 'Kaliyuga, Chakri and Bhakti: Ramakrishna and His Times', in *Writing Social History,* chapter 8.

95. A preface, by Ramanikanta Biswas, describes how the money for its publication had to be raised by 'begging'. The book came out two years after the

death of its author, who had been an intimate disciple of Harichand himself. Tarakchandra Sarkar, *Sri Sri Harileelamrita,* op. cit., p. i.

96. Ibid., pp. 15–16.

97. Ibid., pp. 49–51.

98. The history that it presents is the now-familiar tale of descent from a Brahman-Shudra marriage, and debasement due to Buddhist loyalties and the machinations of Ballal Sen. But the story is at once made more concrete and focused on Harichand's lineage. This is traced back to a Maithili Brahman who had migrated to Jessore, been impressed by the courageous, unjustly degraded Namasudras, and married his son to a Namasudra girl.

99. Thus, to cite one instance among many, this is how Guruchand supposedly convinced his followers to stay away from bhadralok nationalists during the Swadeshi movement of 1905: 'If a rich man and a poor man walk along the same path/The rich always makes the poor carry his luggage/And introduces him to others as his servant/. . . How oppressive the zamindars are/Have they [bhadralok nationalists] ever tried to stop such things?/Don't touch, don't touch, say the Brahmans and Kayasths/Has anyone tried to broaden their hearts? 'Ibid., p. 174.

100. See p. 100, and *passim*.

101. Ibid., pp. 100–10, 140–66.

102. For some details of the Gournadi developments, see chapter 3 in Sumit Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames.*

103. Ibid.. p. 530.

104. Ibid., pp. 518, 567–74.

105. See *Guruchand-Charit,* p. 131.

106. 'From alienation to integration' is the title of Sekhar Bandyopadhyay's two concluding chapters in *Caste, Protest and Identity*, dealing with leaders and peasants successively. To be fair to Bandyopadhyay, the data and analysis in his book actually often contradict the impression which a hasty reader might get from these titles, whether in approval or criticism.

107. Ibid., pp. 236–7.

108. Ibid., pp. 253, 442. Even the convergences with conservative highcaste positions could sometimes flow from rather different and largely internal pressures, as emphasised recently in a fine study of Rajbansi participation in the anti-Muslim abduction agitation of the mid-1920s: Pradip Kumar Datta, 'Abductions and the Constellation of a Hindu Communal Bloc in Bengal of the 1920s', *Studies in History,* xiv.i, January–June 1998; and Datta, *Carving Blocs,* chapter 4.

109. Krishnabhabini Biswas, ed., *Mahishya-Mahila,* published by Damodar Biswas, Post Office Kumari, Nadia, volume I (Calcutta, 1318/1911); volume III, 5–6 (Magh-Falgun 1320/1914); volume iv, 5–6 (Magh–Falgun 1321/1915). The *Streer Patra* piece is particularly interesting, as the title is identical with that of a famous short story of Rabindranath written in the voice of an oppressed and ultimately rebellious housewife, which had been published just six months earlier: *Sabuj-Patra,* Sravan 1321/1914—a very striking instance of inter-textuality across caste–class divides.

110. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity,* op. cit., pp. 200–1.

111. See chapter vi in Sumit Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames.*

112. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments,* chapter 9.

113. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity,* pp. 145, 235–6.

114. Digindranarayan Bhattacharya, *Chaturvarna-Vibha* (Serajgunj/Calcutta, 1925), pp. 68–77.

Chapter 11

*Copyright © 2004 Christophe Jaffrelot. Reproduced by permission of the author. First published in Christophe Jaffrelot, *Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability: Analysing and Fighting Caste* (London and New Delhi: C. Hurst and Permanent Black, 2004). The extract reproduced is from chapter 3, pp. 31–42. For publication details of the sources cited, the reader will need to consult the bibliography in the book from which this extract has been taken.

1. O. Herrenschmidt, '"L'inegalité graduée" ou la pire des inégalités. L'analyse de la société hindoue par Ambedkar', *Archives européennes de sociologie,* 37 (1997), p. 7.

2. O. Mendelsohn and M. Vicziany recognize the striking similarities 'between Dumont's work and that of Ambedkar' without really analysing them (Mendelsohn and Vicziany, *The Untouchables,* p. 20). Both feature an interpretation of caste as forming a *system,* whose twin pillars abide by the practice of endogamy and a hierarchical organization based on ritual purity.

3. It was the case, for instance, of the 'Untouchables or the Children of India's Ghetto', in Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches,* vol. 5, Bombay: Govt of Maharashtra, 1989.

4. B.R. Ambedkar, 'Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development', *Indian Antiquary,* May 1917, vol. 61, reprinted in Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches,* vol. 1, Bombay: Govt of Maharashtra, 1979, p. 22.

5. Ibid., p. 21.

6. Ibid., p. 15.

7. Srinivas defined it as the imitation of the upper castes by the lower castes which adopt, for example, a vegetarian diet in order to be ascribed a higher status. (M.N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India,* Oxford University Press, 1965.)

8. I am grateful to Ramachandra Guha for drawing my attention to the protohistory of the notion of Sanskritization.

9. B.R. Ambedkar, 'Castes in India', p. 8. He also writes in the same vein: 'The castes in the singular number is an unreality. Castes exist only in the plural number. There is no such thing as caste: there are always castes.' Ibid., p. 20.

10. B.R. Ambedkar, 'Castes in India', p. 6.

11. Ibid., p. 16.

12. Ibid., pp. 17 and 19.

13. Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus. Le systéme des castes et ses implications,* Paris: Gallimard, 1966.

14. Ibid., p. 61

15. *Hymnes spéculatifs du Veda* (translated by Louis Renou), Paris: Gallimard Unesco, 1956, p. 99 (Rig Veda, chant X, strophe 90).

16. B.R. Ambedkar, 'Who were the Shudras? How They came to be the Fourth Varna in the Indo-Aryan Society?', in Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 7, Bombay: Govt of Maharashtra, 1990, p. 25.

17. Ibid., p. 26.

18. Ibid., pp. 32–3. Metaphors of the body are never innocent, as demonstrated by J. Schlanger in *Les métaphores du corps,* Paris: Vrin, 1971. I am grateful to Olivier Herrens chmidt for drawing my attention to this book.

19. B.R. Ambedkar, 'Who were the Shudras?', p. 26.

20. B.R. Ambedkar, 'The Buddha and his Dhamma', in Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches,* vol. 11, Bombay: Govt of Maharashtra, 1992, p. 91.

21. For a discussion of exceptional subtlety of this category, see O. Herrenschmidt, 'L'inégalité graduée', pp. 16–17.

22. K.R. Narayanan, 'En souvenir d'Ambedkar', *Les Temps modernes,* July 1993, p. 133.

23. B.R. Ambedkar, 'Philosophy of Hinduism', in Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches,* vol. 3, Bombay: Govt of Maharashtra, 1987, p. 66.

24. B.R. Ambedkar, 'Revolution', in ibid., p. 320.

25. B.R. Ambedkar, 'Untouchables or the Children of India's Ghetto', in Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches,* vol. 5, Bombay: Govt of Maharashtra, 1989, pp. 101–2.

26. On this point, see J.-L. Chambard, 'Les castes dans l'Inde moderne, leur place dans la vie politique et économique', *Revue économique et sociale* (Lausanne),

September 1967.

27. O. Herrenschmidt, 'L'inegalité graduée', p. 14.

28. B.R. Ambedkar, 'Held at Bay', in Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches,* vol. 5, p. 266.

29. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches,* vol. 2, Bombay: Govt of Maharashtra, 1982, p. 489. At the same time, he took the case of Brahmins to illustrate the theory according to which 'Caste, to be real can exist only by disintegrating a group. The genius of caste is to divide and to disintegrate.' (B.R. Ambedkar, 'The Curse of Caste', in Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches,* vol. 5, p. 211.)

30. O. Herrenschmidt, 'L'inegalité graduée', p. 20.

31. B.R. Ambedkar, *Who were the Shudras?*, pp. 65–85.

32. Ibid., p. 110.

33. Ibid., p. 111.

34. Ibid., p. 112.

35. Ibid., p. 114.

36. Ibid., p. 156.

37. Ibid., pp. 174–5.

38. B.R. Ambedkar, *The Untouchables. Who were they and why they became Untouchables?* in Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches,* vol. 7, pp. 290–303.

39. Ibid., p. 305.

40. Ibid., p. 275.

41. According to Russel and Lal, 'the balance of opinion seems to be that the native name of Bombay, Maharashtra, is derived from that of the [Mahar] caste.'

(R.V. Russel and Hira Lal, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India,* vol. 4, p. 129.)

42. We can thus qualify his association though he did not wish to limit its influence to the Mahars. Indeed 'Anarya Dosh Pariharak Samaj' means 'the association for the elimination of the stigmas of untouchability': but, in practice, Mahars were its main supporters (see R.E. Enthoven, *The Tribes and Castes of Bombay,* Bombay: 1922 , and R .V. Russell and Hira Lal, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India,* vol. 4, p. 129.)

43. B.R. Ambedkar, *The Untouchables,* p. 317.

44. Ibid., p. 350.

45. G. Omvedt, 'Undoing the Bondage: Dr Ambedkar's Theory of Dalit Liberation', in K.C. Yadav (ed.), *From Periphery to Centre Stage,* p. 132.

46. Ibid., p. 134.

Chapter 12

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1. For a very useful edition of *Harijan* (in nineteen volumes), see Joan Bondurant 1973. Separate references are given below for all passages cited in the text.

2. For an understanding of reform and protest movements among the lower castes the following studies, to which I have made allusive references in my work, are cited; their full publication details are given in the bibliography. For a critical survey of literature on social movements, see T.K. Oommen 1991; M.S.A. Rao 1979a and 1979b; G.A. Oddie 1979; Rosalind O'Hanlon 1985; John C.B. Webster 1992; Abdul Malik Mujahid 1989; Mark Juergensmeyer 1982; Sumit Sarkar 1983; Robert L. Hardgrave Jr. 1969; V. Ramakrishna 1983; Susan Bayly 1989; Gail Omvedt 1976; Eugene Irschick 1969. Also see Sourabh Dube 1992: I am grateful to the author for having given me an opportunity to read his unpublished thesis. For a detailed study of the Mahima movement, see Faninandham Dev 1993.

[3.] David Washbrook 1977. Two chapters—'The Vocabulary of Communal Politics', and 'Home Rule League, Justice Party and Congress'—are of special relevance for our theme. [No bibliographical details are provided by the author. Two works by David Washbrook are relevant to his discussion: 'The Development of Caste Organisation in South India', in D.A. Washbrook and C.J. Baker, eds, *South India: Political Institutions and Political Change* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1975); and David Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics: The Madras Presidency 1870–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).—Ed.]

[4.] S. Chandrashekhar n.d. has a detailed discussion on non-Brahmin movements in South India. Also see S. Chandrashekhar 1995—the published monograph version of the S. Chandaeshekhar n.d.

[5.] Bjorne Hettne uses this concept in the context of analyzing the politics of princely Mysore. See Hettne 1978: 43. Also see for a discussion of non-Brahmin politics of princely Mysore, James Manor 1977: 58–73.

[6.] Bhagvan Das 1963: 88–9.

[7.] See chap. 3, Gandhi and the Dalit Question: Comparison with Marx and Ambedkar', in Nagaraj, *The Flaming Feet,* for a discussion of this theme.

[8.] *Harijan* I (1933): 8.

[9.] Ravinder Kumar 1985: 21.

[10.] Raghavan Iyer 1973: 226.

[11.] *Harijan* I (1933): 2.

[12.] Ibid.: 3.

[13.] Rammanohar Lohia's *The Caste System* shows the theoretical affinity between Lohia and Ambedkar.

[14.] See, for a discussion of Gandhiji's critique of modern civilization, Bhikhu Parekh 1982: 11–36.

[15.] These concepts arose in a discussion with my friend Dr Satya Goutam of Chandigarh University on the possibility of using Wittgensteinian categories to

study such situations.

16. For a study of the Temple Entry movements in Maharashtra and Gujarat, see Makarand Mehta 1993.

17. Eleanor Zelliot 1972: 82–3.

18. See, for an Advaitin reading of Gandhiji, Ramachandra Gandhi 1986: 31–43.

19. *Harijan*, 8 July 1944.

20. *Harijan* I (1933): 5.

21. Ibid.: 36.

22. Ibid.: 5.

23. See chaps 14, 15, and 16 in *The Flaming Feet* for discussions of this theme.

24. *Harijan,* 4 March 1933.

25. Ibid.

26. *Harijan*, 6 May 1933: 1.

27. If Professor B.K. Matilal were to write a history of those who used *vitanda* in the twentieth century, he would not have found an uncontested place for Bapu in it. In any case, Lenin would have topped the list, for he had acquired talents for dialectical thinking from the Guru, Marx himself. Many writers on Indian philosophy, including Professor Matilal, translate *vitanda* as 'dialectical method'.

28. Renford Bambrough 1991: 244–5.

29. Recently, many studies using metaphor as a central methodological principle have appeared. See, for instance, Bipin Indurkhya 1992: 21–6. There is an interesting section on metaphors in non-linguistic domains, though it stops short of exploring metaphors in political discourse. The works of Paul Ricouer are of immense interest in this regard. See also Donald Miller 1992.

30. If put together what Mahadev Desai has written on this untouchable boy, it will read like a short story pregnant with multiple meanings. See *Harijan* I, the

issues from 13 May to June 1933 for the entire story I have narrated in this chapter.

31. *Harijan*, 10 June 1933.

32. *Harijan*, 28 December 1935.

33. *Harijan* II, 21 December 1934: 354.

34. Ibid., 27 October 1933, Vol. 1, p. 4.

35. Ibid., 7 September 1934, Vol. 2, p. 236.

36. Lacoue-Labarthe uses this concept of ontological difference while defending Heidegger against the attacks launched by many writers, including Adorno who argued that the much celebrated German philosopher's thought is 'fascist right down to its inner most components'. See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe 1990. The clarification of a point will be in order here: I am more interested in using this particular notion of 'ontological difference' rather than endorsing the author's defence of Heidegger. I am equally fascinated by Lacoue-Labarthe's ideas regarding the quite complex relation between politics, aesthetic categories, and philosophy. See Lacoue-Labarthe 1989.

Chapter 13

*Copyright © 2001 M.S.S. Pandian. Reproduced by permission of the author. This is an expanded version of a talk which was prepared for, but which could not be delivered at, the plenary session of the University of Wisconsin 30th Annual Conference on South Asia held in October 2001. I am grateful to the Centre for South Asia, University of Wisconsin-Madison, whose invitation to the conference made this paper happen. The ideas expressed here owe a great deal to my long-standing and ongoing dialogue with Aditya Nigam and Nivedita Menon. Comments on an earlier draft from Itty Abraham, Anandhi S., Theodore Baskaran, Venkatesh Chakravarthy, Chris Chekuri, John Harriss, J. Jeyaranjan, Sankaran Krishna, Ramsamy Mahalingam, Nivedita Menon, Aditya Nigam, and R. Srivatsan are gratefully acknowledged. The title ‘One Step Outside Modernity’ is a generous gift from Chris Chekuri.

1. R.K. Narayan, *My Days: A Memoir* (1974; rpnt. Mysore: Indian Thought Publications, 2000).

2. Ibid., p. 161.

3. Uncritical admirers of R.K. Narayan would object to this mode of reading his writings. For instance, N. Ram, a co-biographer of Narayan, writes: 'The criticism is occasionally heard, from literary scholars and others, that Narayan's Malgudi is a literary cocoon, where real-life conflicts, turbulence and socio-economic misery are not encountered. Naipaul, for one, seems to have given some credence to this complaint. But when Narayan is in flow, such criticism seems misdirected, almost banal. Who is to say with what theme or problem or slice of life or imaginative experience a novelist must deal?' *Frontline,* 8 June 2001, p. 12. Such generosity towards the flow of creativity locates creativity outside the social and declines to interrogate critically what an author chooses *not to engage with*, which is as important as what s/he chooses to engage with.

4. Bhama, *Karukku* (Madurai: Samudaya Sinthanai Seyal Aaivu Mayyam, 1994); Viramma *et al., Viramma: Life of an Untouchable* (London: Verso, 1997); Arjun Dangle (ed.), *A Corpse in the Well: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Autobiographies* (1992; rpnt. Hyderabad: Disha Books, 1994); Vasant Moon, *Growing Up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography,* trans. Gail Omvedt (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001).

5. Though the paper talks about caste in general, it draws its instances from the Brahmins and Dalits. It is so because, given their location in the caste hierarchy, their instances can be of help in sharply delineating the argument of the paper.

6. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (1993; rpnt. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 7.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., p. 98.

9. Partha Chatterjee is not unaware of this problem. However, even while acknowledging this problem, the primary focus of the book is on the opposition between nationalism and colonialism. It is my plea that if we shift the emphasis

from the contradiction between nationalism and colonialism to the contradictions within nationalism, the outcomes would be rather different.

10. K. Chandrasekharan, *P.S. Sivaswamy Aiyer* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Govt. of India, 1969), pp. 152–3.

11. Ibid., p. 119.

12. Ibid., p. 113.

13. Ibid., p. 114. This story of Sivaswami Aiyer is not exceptional. One can cite from innumerable similar accounts about the Tamil Brahmin elite. Take, for instance, the case of S. Satyamurti, the lawyer and nationalist well known for his English debating skills. Of him, it was written: 'He believed in all the rituals ordained by the Shastras as well as tradition. His day would usually began very early with a bath and the performance of daily religious rites. He would recite or read (do *parayana*) at least a few verses of the Ramayana and perform the simple ordinary poojahs which every Hindu householder is enjoined to do and then only proceed to attend to his normal duties as a public man. Even when he was courting imprisonment, he first finished his daily religious routine and then went and courted arrest. Even in the prison he would not give up his daily routine of *poojahs.'* R. Parthasarathy, *S. Satyamurti* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Govt. of India, 1979, p. 201).

14. Chandrasekharan, *Sivaswamy Aiyer,* p. 23.

15. Mayuram Vedanayagam Pillai, *Prathaba Mudaliar Charitram* (1879; rpnt. Chennai, 1984), p. 302.

16. It is rather instructive here to take note of what Stuart Hall and David Held have to say about citizenship: 'The issue around membership-who does and who does not belong-is where the *politics* of citizenship begins. It is impossible to chart the history of the concept very far without coming sharply up against successive attempts to restrict citizenship to certain groups and to exclude others. In different historical periods, different groups have led, and profited from, this "politics of closure": property-owners, men, white people, the educated, those in particular occupations or with particular skills, adults.' Stuart Hall and David Held, 'Citizens and Citizenship', in Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (eds), *New Times: The*

Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), p. 175.

17. *Gandhi*, 6 November 1933.

18. For a recent attempt to characterize Ambedkar as a British collaborator, see Arun Shourie, *Worshipping False Gods: Ambedkar and the Facts which Have Been Erased* (New Delhi: ASA Publications, 1997). Characteristically, one of the chapters in the book is titled 'The British Stratagem and Its Indian Advocate'.

19. P.V. Jagadisa Aiyyar, *South Indian Customs* (1925; rpnt. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1985), p. ix.

20. Here is yet another instance of bringing forth Western authority to defend caste pollution: *Arya Bala Bodini*, a children's magazine brought out by the Theosophical Society, includes this in 1897: 'The Brahmins, particularly the Vaisnavites, insist that they be not seen by others while at dinner. The custom is denounced and declared silly. Efforts are made now and then to bring a miscellaneous crowd to eat together and any success that might attend such gatherings is advertised as grand. People, who ought to know better, exult in such *small triumphs,* as they would put it, over blind orthodoxy. Let us, however, see what a distinguished Westerner has to say on this subject. Says Professor Max Muller in the *Cosmopolis* thus: "The Hindus seem to me to show their good taste by retiring while they feed, and re-appear only after they have washed their hands and face. Why should we be so anxious to perform this no doubt necessary function before the eyes of our friends? Could not at least the grosser part of feeding be performed in private, and the social gathering begin at the dessert, or, with men, at the wine . . ." *Arya Bala Bodini*, III (5), May 1897, p. 114.

21. *New India,* 58 (77), 1 April 1916.

22. Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments,* p. 238.

23. For a recent and highly sophisticated account of the simultaneous inseparability and antagonism between state and community, see Sankaran Krishna, *Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka and the Question of Nationhood* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press: 1999). Let me also note here that the relationship between the narrative of capital and that of community

need not always be one of opposition. They can come together in denying a universal Western narrative of capital. For example, see Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logic of Transnationality* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999).

24. Emphasizing these two roles of a sociologist, M.N. Srinivas wrote, 'The Government of India has an understandable tendency to stress the need for sociological research that is directly related to planning and development. And it is the duty of the sociologists as citizens that they should take part in such research. But there is a grave risk that "pure" or "fundamental" might be sacrificed altogether.' M.N. Srinivas (ed.), *India's Villages* (1955; rpnt. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963), p. 5.

25. M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1972).

26. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). Walter Mignolo characterizes the 'denial of coevalness' as 'the replacement of the "other" in space by the "other" in time . . . and the articulation of cultural differences in chrological hierarchies.' Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality & Colonization* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. xi.

27. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India,* p. 60.

28. Ibid., p. 77.

29. This is very similar to the manner in which race figures in Western discourse. As Paul Gilroy notes, 'the history of slavery is somehow assigned to blacks. It becomes our special property rather than a part of the ethical and intellectual heritage of the West as a whole.' Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 49.

30. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India,* p. 148.

31. Ibid., p. 152.

32. Ibid., pp. 152–3.

33. Rajni Kothari (ed.), *Caste in Indian Politics* (1970; rpnt. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1986), p. 6.

34. Chantal Mouffe, 'Feminism, Citizenship and Radical Democratic Politics', in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (eds), *Feminists Theorise the Political* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 379.

35. D.R. Nagaraj, *The Flaming Feet: A Study of the Dalit Movement* (Bangalore: South Forum Press, 1993), pp. 7–8.

36. Moon, *Growing Up Untouchable,* p. 159.

37. Asghar Ali Engineer (ed.), *MandalCommission Controversy* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1991), p. 190.

38. In fact, Ashok Mitra's view on the implementation of Mandal Commission is not different from that of M.N. Srinivas. Srinivas too lists, in the context of his opposition to the Mandal Commission recommendations, a similar set of problems as the real ones: 'Social and educational backwardness are best tackled by anti-poverty programmes. Backwardness is due in large measure to poverty and the many ills that go with it. Malnutrition affects productivity; illiteracy is inseparable from ignorance and superstition. The lack of access to shelter, clothing and hygiene and sanitation makes people backward. There is such a thing as a "culture of poverty".' Ibid., p. 133. The obvious similarity between Ashok Mitra and Srinivas points to the elite consensus, despite differing ideological locations, on the question of caste.

39. Ibid., pp. 190–1.

40. Rajni Kothari (ed.), *Caste in Indian Politics,* p. 4. For a similar argument, see D.L. Sheth, 'Changing Terms of Elite Discourse: The Case of Reservation for "Other Backward Classes"', in TV. Sathyamurthy (ed.) *Region, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in Contemporary India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

41. Arjun Dangle (ed.), *A Corpse in the Well,* p. 32.

42. See Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, p. 49.

43. Ibid., p. 191.

44. A more systematic statement of the same can be found in Kancha Ilaiah's notion of 'Dalitisation'. See Kancha Ilaiah, *Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy* (Calcutta: Samya, 1996), ch. VII.

45. I have analysed Raj Gowthaman's writings in detail elsewhere. The materials used here are drawn from 'Stepping Outside History; New Dalit Writings from Tamilnadu', in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *Wages of Freedom: 50 Years of the Indian Nation-State* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

46. Upper-caste politics which refuses to speak caste as caste is what gets written as *politics* without any qualification. Politics that invokes caste is always Dalit politics or the politics of the 'backwards'.

47. On the notion of subaltern counter-public, see Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', in Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (1992; rpnt. Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 1996).

48. Quoted in V. Arasu, 'Tamil Sirupathirigai Choolalum Dalit Karuthdalum', in Ravi Kumar (ed.), *Dalit Kali-Illakiyam-Arasiyal* (Neyveli: Dalit Kalai Vizha Kulu, 1996), p. 217.

Chapter 14

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Notes to Chapter 7: Ritual Status and Political Conflict in Later-Nineteenth-Century Maharashtra

1. The *Dnyanprakash* newspaper of 12 March 1860 reported the marriage of a widower and a widow of the Shenavi caste. Phule may have supported this effort: see D. Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley, Father of Indian Social Revolution,* Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1974, p. 86.

2. Gajananrao Ganpatrao Phule to P.S. Patil, Bombay, 15 April 1930, P.S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

3. See pp. 112–13 of O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology.*

4. Mahadu Sahadu Vaghole to P.S. Patil, Pune, 18 November 1940, P.S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

5. This 'Dhondiba' was probably Dhondiram Naindev Kumbhar, a friend and admirer of Phule's, and later a member of the Satyashodhak Samaj and prolific writer.

6. For examples of such origin myths, see Owen Lynch, 'Dr B.R. Ambedkar—Myth and Charisma', in J. Michael Mahar (ed.), *The Untouchables in Contemporary India,* Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1972, pp. 97–112.

Notes to Chapter 8: The Aryan Invasions and the Origins of Caste Society

1. Jotirao Phule, *Slavery,* D. Keer and S.G. Malshe (eds), p. 72. While Phule drew heavily on missionary and Orientalist accounts of ancient India for his description of these struggles, and their survival in nineteenth-century culture, his derivation of the term 'Mahar' from *maha-ari,* 'great enemy', is his own.

2. Jotirao Phule, *A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale,* Keer and Malshe (eds), pp. 7–8.

3. Jotirao Phule, *Slavey,* Keer and Malshe (eds), p. 91.

4. Ibid.

5. Jotirao Phule, *Priestcraft Exposed,* Keer and Malshe (eds), pp. 46–7.

6. For information about these incarnations and the stories associated with them, see J. Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History and Literature,* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968.

7. Jotirao Phule, *Slavery,* Keer and Malshe (eds), pp. 98–9.

8. Ibid., p, 100.

9. Ibid., p. 102.

10. Ibid., pp. 102–3.

11. Ibid., pp. 107–10.

12. Ibid., p. 112. The figure of Brahma was often represented with four faces.

13. Ibid. Here, Phule makes rather a crude pun on the Marathi phrase *sarvakrta,* meaning 'everywhere in use', and the word 'Sanskrit'.

14. Ibid., p. 114.

15. Ibid., pp. 115–16.

16. Ibid., p. 116.

17. Phule's analysis here bears some resemblance in Max Weber's later description of the basis of Brahmanic priestly power in 'knowledge'. Weber described how the possession of this knowledge shaped the human possibility for good and evil, so that all evil could be ascribed to the lack of it in ignorance. Brahmans were 'a status group of genteel literati whose magical charisma rests on "knowledge". Such knowledge was magical and ritualistic in character, deposited in a holy literature, written in a holy language remote from that of everyday speech.' Max Weber, *The Religion of India,* New York: The Free Press, 1958, p. 139.

18. Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds), p. 113.

19. Ibid., p. 119. The *gayatri mantra* was one of the most sacred verses of the Vedas used in prayer. According to Jadunath Sarkar this was the verse that was deliberately withheld by the Brahmans at the coronation of Shivaji Bhosale, since it represented the last bastion of Brahman exclusiveness: Jadunath Sarkar, *Shivaji and His Times,* Bombay: Orient Longman, 1973, p. 206. It was probably this significance of the *gayatri mantra* that Phule was trying to reflect here.

20. Ibid., p. 120.

21. See p. 115 of O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology.*

22. Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds), pp. 120–1.

23. See Molesworth's *Marathi-English Dictionary,* p. 74.

24. I am indebted for much of my information in this section to Joan Leopold, 'The Aryan Theory of Race', *Indian Economic and Social History Review,* vol. 7, no. 2, June 1970, pp. 271–97.

25. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, *The Arctic Home of the Vedas,* Pune, 1903, quoted in J. Leopold, 'The Aryan Theory of Race', p. 275.

26. M.G. Ranade, in M.B. Kolasker (ed.), *Religious and Social Reform,* quoted in J. Leopold, 'The Aryan Theory of Race', pp. 279–81.

27. For an account of Dayananda Sarasvati's *Satyartha Prakash,* see J.T.F. Jordens, *Dayananda Sarasvati: His Life and Ideas,* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978, pp. 99–126.

28. For more detail, see the very interesting chapter on the Norman Yoke in Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the Seventeenth Century,* London: Mercury Books, 1962, pp. 50–122. I am also indebted here to a very useful discussion with Dr Francis Robinson.

29. Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution,* p. 57.

30. Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974, p. 234.

Chapter 15

*Copyright © 2003 David Hardiman. Reproduced by permission of the author. First published as chapter 6 in David Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Time and Ours* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), pp. 123–54. The last two pages of the chapter have not been included as they mainly summarize what has preceded them. For publication details of works cited the reader should refer to the book from which this extract is taken.

1. In using these terms to describe these groups in the past I am aware that my usage is anachronistic. However, rather than deploy a series of evolving terms—such as 'Untouchables', 'Depressed Classes', 'early tribes', 'Harijans', 'Scheduled Castes and Tribes' and the like—I have used the terms that these people

commonly use to describe themselves in contemporary India. It will be clear from the text that other terms were used at different times. For a fuller justification of my usage as regards the Adivasis, see my book *The Coming of the Devi,* pp. 11–16. It should also be noted that there have been moves in recent years to build a wider 'Dalit' alliance of the oppressed that includes Adivasis. Generally, however, the two groups continue to regard themselves as distinct, and my usage here reflects this.

2. Shalini Randeria, 'The Politics of Representation and Exchange among Untouchables Castes in Western India (Gujarat)', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Freien Universitat Berlin, pp. 102–35.

3. Randeria, 'Politics of Representation', pp. 21–3.

4. *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency,* vol. IX, part I, *Gujarat Population: Hindus,* Government Central Press, Bombay, 1901, pp. 331–47, 510–19.

5. Ibid., pp. 290–330.

6. Gandhi stated in 1928 that 'I don't know how the story about miraculous powers possessed by me has got abroad, I can only tell you that I am but an ordinary mortal susceptible to the same weakness, influences and the rest as every other human being and that I possess no extraordinary powers.' Letter to Barbara Bauer, 13 July 1928, *CWMG,* vol. 42, p. 234.

7. V.N. Volosinov, *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique,* New York, Academic Press, 1976, p. 25.

8. Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform,* p. 215.

9. Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi,* p. 49.

10. 'Speech on Caste System, Ahmedabad', 5 June 1916, *CWMG,* vol. 15, p. 226.

11. 'Caste "Versus" Class', *Young India,* 29 December 1920, *CWMG,* vol. 22, p. 154

12. 'The Hindu Caste System', *Bharat Sevak,* October 1916, *CWMG,* vol. 15, p. 258.

13. Bhatt, 'Caste and Political Mobilisation in a Gujarat District'.

14. 'The Hindu Caste System', *Bharat Sevak,* October 1916, *CWMG,* vol. 15, p. 259.

15. Letter to 'The Indian Social Reformer', 26 February 1919, *CWMG,* vol. 17, pp. 320–1.

16. 'Invasion in the Name of Religion', *Navajivan,* 7 June 1925, *CWMG,* vol. 31, pp. 445–6.

17. 'A Caste and Communal Question', *Young India,* 4 June 1931, *CWMG,* vol. 52, p. 255.

18. Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 52.

19. 'Caste Must Go', *Harijan,* 16 November 1935, *CWMG,* vol. 68, p. 152.

20. 'Marriage by Purchase', *Harijan,* 23 May 1936, *CWMG,* vol. 69, p. 31.

21. Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 53.

22. 'Draft Constitution for the Ashram', 20 May 1915, *CWMG,* vol. 14, pp. 456–7.

23. Letter to V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, 23 September 1915, *CWMG,* vol. 15, p. 46.

24. Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform*, pp. 215–16.

25. Ibid., pp. 217–20.

26. Robin Jeffrey, 'A Sanctified Label—"Congress", in Travancore Politics, 1938–48', in D.A. Low (ed.), *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle 1917–47,* London, Heinemann, 1977, p. 413.

27. The interchange between Gandhi and the Brahman is set out in full in Eleanor Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*, New Delhi, Manohar, 1996, p. 161.

28. Ibid., p. 161.

29. Ibid., p. 163.

30. Ibid., pp. 68–9; Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution,* pp. 151–2.

31. Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit,* pp. 163–5.

32. Mahadev Desai, *The Diary of Mahadev Desai*, vol. 1, *Yeravda-Pact Eve, 1932,* Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1953, p. 52.

33. Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit*, p. 166.

34. Mahadev Desai, *The Diary of Mahadev Desai,* vol. 1, p. 301.

35. Gandhi was unhappy with the Gujarati term for 'Untouchable'—that of Antyaja—and asked the readers of *Navajivan* to suggest a better word. Jagannath Desai of Rajkot pointed out that the great bhakti *sant* of Saurashtra, Narsinh Mehta, had described his Antyaja devotees as 'Harijans'. Gandhi promptly adopted the term. 'My Notes', *Navajivan,* 2 August 1931, *CWMG,* vol. 53, p. 166.

36. Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution,* pp. 176–8; Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit*, p. 69.

37. This point is made by D.R. Nagaraj, *The Flaming Feet: A Study of the Dalit Movement in India*, Bangalore, South Forum Press, 1993, p. 24.

38. Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit,* pp. 171–2. For a study of Ambedkar's long-drawn-out move towards Buddhism, see Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998, pp. 211–39.

39. Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution,* pp. 263–6.

40. Ibid., p. 267.

41. Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform,* p. 240.

42. Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit,* p. 150. Zelliot detects some irony in this, as Gandhi, she states, did not believe in such legalistic solutions to social problems. This fails to take into account the fact that Gandhi's position had shifted in the 1940s.

43. Nagaraj, *The Flaming Feet,* p. 2.

44. Ibid., pp. 3–4.

45. Ibid., pp. 21 and 24–5.

46. These issues were publicised at a major all-India Dalit conference, in Bhopal (in January 2002). See V. Venkatesan, 'The Dalit Cause', *Frontline*, vol. 19, no. 3, 15 February 2002.

47. B.S. Nagaraj, 'Stop "Provocative" Dalit Conversion Plan: NCM', *The Indian Express,* 1 November 2001; Dom Moraes, 'Shorn off [sic] an Oppressed Past', *The Hindu,* Magazine Section, 18 November 2001.

48. *A Social and Economic Atlas of India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 27.

49. On this, see in particular David Hardiman, 'Power in the Forest: The Dangs, 1820–1940', in David Arnold and David Hardiman (eds), *Subaltern Studies VIII*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994; and Ajay Skaria, 'Timber Conservancy, Desiccationism and Scientific Forestry: The Dangs 1840s–1920s', in Richard Grove, Vinita Damodaran, and Satpal Sangwan (eds), *Nature and the Orient: The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia,* New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998.

50. On usurers, see Hardiman, *Feeding the Baniya*; on liquor dealers, see David Hardiman, 'From Custom to Crime: The Politics of Drinking in Colonial-South Gujarat', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies IV,* New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1985.

51. Bhatt, 'Caste Mobilization in a Gujarat District', pp. 320–1.

52. Indulal Yagnik, *Atmakatha,* vol. 2, Ahmedabad, Gujarat Grantharatan Karyalay, 1970, pp. 158–61.

53. Ibid., pp. 302–5.

54. Ibid., pp. 316–18, 325, 328–30.

55. Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 8–11.

56. Ibid., pp. 58–61.

57. Ibid., pp. 74–6.

58. Motilal Tejawat's movement is documented in Premsinh Kankariya, *Bhil Kranti ke Praneta: Motilal Tejawat,* Udaipur, Rajasthan Sahitya Academy, 1985 (in Hindi); Prakash Chandra Jain, *Tribal Agrarian Movement: A Case Study of the Bhil Movement of Rajasthan,* Udaipur, Himanshu Publications, 1989, chapters 3 and 4; Sen, 'Popular Protest in Mewar, chapter 6; Vidal, *Violence and Truth,* chapter 5.

59. 'Danger of Mass Movement', *Young India,* 2 February 1922, *CWMG,* vol. 22, p. 315.

60. Motilal Tejawat to Gandhi, 11 February 1922, *Navajivan,* 26 February 1922, p. 203.

61. 'Motilal Tejavat and the "Bhils"', *Navajivan,* 26 February 1922, *CWMG*, vol. 26, p. 237.

62. Press Communique of Government of India, 10 March 1922, National Archives of India (NAI), Foreign and Political Department, 428–P (Secret-Printed) of 1922–3.

63. In December 1997 I interviewed a number of old Bhil men and women of the villages around the site of the firing, who asserted that the casualties were of this order.

64. Reverend J. Irwin Lea, *Report of the Church Missionary Society Western India Mission 1922,* Madras, Diocesan Press, 1923, p. 44.

65. Quoted in a memo, from F. & P. Dept. to India Office, 15 March 1923, NAI file on Motilal Tejawat.

66. No mention of the massacre was made in either of Gandhi's weeklies, *Young India* or *Navajivan*.

67. See for example *Saurashtra,* 25 March 1922.

68. Gandhi can be absolved from this particular charge, as he was arrested and jailed immediately after the massacre, on 10 March.

69. Political Sec. F. & P. Dept., G. of I. to Private Sec. to Viceroy, 13 April 1922; report by H.R.N. Pritchard, 14 April 1922; press communique from F. & P. Dept,

G. of I., 7 May 1922; report by H.R.N. Pritchard, 13 May 1922, NAI file on Motilal Tejawat.

70. *Secrct Police Abstracts of Intelligence, Bombay Presidency,* Bombay 1921, p. 217.

71. I have discussed this all in detail in my study of this movement, *The Coming of the Devi,* pp. 166–76.

72. Yagnik, *Atmakatha,* vol. 3, p. 249.

73. Hardiman, *The Coming of the Devi,* pp. 191–5.

74. *Secret Police Abstracts of Intelligence, Bombay Presidency,* Bombay, 1924, pp. 147, 158–9; interview with Chhotubhai Gopalji Desai, Pune, Bardoli Taluka, 28 May 1981.

75. *The Servant of India*, vol. 6, no. 26, 26 July 1926, p. 311.

76. Hardiman, *The Coming of the Devi,* pp. 207–8.

77. David Arnold, 'Rebellious Hillmen: The Gudem-Rampa Risings 1839–1924', in Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies I*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1982, pp. 134–40.

78. Sarat Chandra Roy, *Oraon Religion and Ceremony*, Calcutta, Editions India, 1972 (1st edn 1928), pp. 246–50.

79. K.S. Singh, 'Mahatma Gandhi and the Adivasis', *Man in India,* vol. 20, no. 1, January-March 1970, pp. 7–8.

80. Ibid., p. 6.

81. 'Discussion on Fellowship', *Young India,* 19 January 1928, *CWMG,* vol. 31, p. 462.

82. David Baker, '"A Serious Time", Forest Satyagraha in Madhya Pradesh, 1930', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review,* vol. 21, no. 1, January-March 1984, p. 75.

83. Baker, 'A Serious Time', pp. 75–82.

84. K.S. Singh, 'The Haribaba Movement in Chotanagpur 1931–32', *The Journal of the Bihar Research Society,* vol. 49, pts 1–4, January–December 1963.

85. Letter to Verrier Elwin, 23 February 1933, *CWMG,* vol. 59, p. 346.

86. Ramachandra Guha, *Savaging the Civilized: Verrier Elwin, His Tribals and India,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999, pp. 54, 59–60, 65–6.

87. Letter to Verrier Elwin, 14 January 1933, *CWMG*, vol. 59, p. 13.

88. Ramachandra Guha, *Savaging the Civilized,* p. 88.

89. Ibid., pp. 89–90, 95.

90. Verrier Elwin, 'Gonds', *Modern Review,* November 1933, pp. 547–8, quoted in Ramachandra Guha, *Savaging the Civilized,* p. 98

91. Ibid., pp. 99–100.

92. Ibid., pp. 107–8.

93. Ibid., p. 108.

94. I have argued this in the case of the Devi movement in South Gujarat in my book, *The Coming of the Devi,* pp. 157–60.

95. *The Times of India,* 24 January 1938.

97. Ramachandra Guha, *Savaging the Civilized,* p. 105.

98. Ibid., p. l08.

99. K.S. Singh, 'The Freedom Movement and Tribal Sub-Movements, 1920–1947', in B.R. Nanda (ed.), *Essays in Modern Indian History,* New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 164. Gyanendra Pandey has pointed out that the Muslim League was at that time projecting itself as the representative of a minority group with interests in common with other minorities in India who were all oppressed by the Congress—the party of the high-caste Hindu and capitalist: Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 28.

100. 'Notes: Adivasis', *Harijan,* 18 January 1942, *CWMG,* vol. 81, p. 419.

101. 'Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place', 13 December 1941, *CWMG,* vol. 81, pp. 369–70.

102. 'Discussion on Fellowship', *Young India,* 19 January 1928, *CWMG,* vol. 31, p. 462.

103. Ramachandra Guha, *Savaging the Civilized,* p. 109.

104. 'Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place', 13 December 1941, *CWMG*, vol. 81, p. 369. In the late 1920s, Thakkar had written in Gujarati that the Bhils, Santals, Gonds, etc. were *'asal vatani'* (original inhabitants) of India: A.V. Thakkar, Leaflet on the Bhil Seva Mandal, c. 1927, in Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner, Mahakma Khas, file M/30, basta 19, 1918. His close associate Laxmidas Shrikant told me in an interview at the Bhil Seva Mandal in Dahod on 30 June 1985 that Thakkar had learnt the term 'Adivasi' from a political leader from southern Bihar who was himself an Adivasi.

105. G.S. Ghurye, *The Scheduled Tribes of India,* New Brunswick, Transaction Books, 1980, p. 19.

106. Speech at Prayer Meeting, 12 June 1947, *CWMG*, vol. 95, p. 266. See also Speech at AICC Meeting, 14 June 1947, *CWMG,* vol. 95, p. 281.

107. Speech at Congress Workers' Conference, 5 January 1946, *CWMG,* vol. 89, p. 178.

108. Discussion with Midnapore Political Workers, 2 January 1946, *CWMG,* vol. 89, p. 157.

109. See for example Gandhi to Mrs S.R. Das, 8 December 1945, *CWMG,* vol. 89, pp. 13–14, and Gandhi to Chimanlal N. Shah, 21 January 1947, *CWMG,* vol. 93, p. 305.

110. Singh, 'The Freedom Movement and Tribal Sub-Movements, 1920–1947', p. 165.

111. As for example in Thana District of Bombay State in 1946–7: see Godavari Parulekar, *Adivasis Revolt: The Story of Warli Peasants in Struggle,* Calcutta, National Book Agency, 1975.

112. This process is chronicled by Jan Breman, *Of Peasants, Migrants and Paupers: Rural Labour Circulation and Capitalist Production in West India,* New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1985.

Chapter 16

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1. Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere,* pp. 175–242; Dalmia, 'Vernacular Histories in Late Nineteenth-Century Banaras'.

2. P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments,* pp. 95–115.

3. Yadvendu, *Yaduvansh ka Aitihas,* p. 157.

4. My most challenging interactions, besides those with my Dalit friends in Delhi, were with Dalit activists in Allahabad. Some of these questions were part of our discussions, especially those concerning the past and present of the Dalits and Hindu academia.

5. Gooptu, *The Politics of the Urban Poor,* pp. 97–100.

6. Briggs, *The Chamars,* p. 20.

7. Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony,* p. 155.

8. Raghuvanshi, *Shree Chanvar Purana,* p. i.

9. Ibid., pp. ii-iii.

10. Ibid., p. 1; Jaiswar Mahasabha, *Suryavansh Kshatriya Jaiswar Sabha,* p. 9.

11. Raghuvanshi, *Shree Chanvar Purana,* pp. 2-4; Jaiswar Mahasabha, *Suryavansh Kshatriya Jaiswar Sabha,* p. 1.

12. Raghuvanshi, *Shree Chanvar Purana,* p. 5.

13. Ibid., pp. 6–12; Jaiswar Mahasabha, *Suryavansh Kshatriya Jaiswar Sabha,* p. 1.

14. Raghuvanshi, *Shree Chanvar Purana,* pp. 14–22; Jaiswar Mahasabha, *Suryavansh Kshatriya Jaiswar Sabha,* pp. 2–6.

15. Raghuvanshi, *Shree Chanvar Purana,* pp. 23–40; Jaiswar Mahasabha, *Suryavansh Kshatriya Jaiswar Sabha,* pp. 6–9.

16. Raghuvanshi, *Shree Chanvar Purana,* pp. 41–2.

17. Ibid., pp. 40–7; Jaiswar Mahasabha, *Suryavansh Kshatriya Jaiswar Sabha,* p. 9.

18. Jaiswar Mahasabha, *Suryavansh Kshatriya Jaiswar Sabha,* pp. 9–10.

19. Sagar, *Yadav Jivan,* pp. 11, 20-40.

20. Ibid., p. 22. Clarke's statement is quoted in English in the Hindi text.

21. Ibid., pp. 21, 31.

22. Ibid., pp. 34–8.

23. Ibid., pp. 22–33.

24. Thapar, 'Society and Historical Consciousness', pp. 134–8.

25. Dalmia, 'Vernacular Histories in Late Nineteenth-Century Banaras', p. 60.

26. Ibid., p. 78.

27. Harischandra, 'Khatriyon ki Utpatti', pp. 251–3, 247–50.

28. Sagar, *Yadav Jivan,* pp. 34–5.

29. *Census of the North-Western Provinces, 1865,* appendix B, pp. 43, 64,71.

30. Elliot, *Memoirs on the History, Folk-Lore, and Distribution of the Races,* vol. 1, p. 69. See also Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh,* vol. 1, p. 169.

31. Briggs, *The Chamars,* p. 15. See also K. Singh, *The Scheduled Castes,* p. 301.

32. K. Singh, *The Scheduled Castes,* p. 301. See also Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability,* pp. 28–9.

33. I have made a detailed study of the weekly police reports (officially known as Police Abstracts of Weekly Intelligence, Criminal Investigation Department, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh) from 1922 to 1928.

34. Sagar, *Yadav Jivan,* pp. 40–1.

35. PAI, March 24, March 31, October 6, 1923; February 23, May 3, May 17, May 24, June 14, September 6, 1924.

36. PAI, March 18, April 22, April 8, 1922.

37. PAI, February 4, November 4, 1922; June 9, January 12, 1923.

38. PAI, January 14, January 28, May 6, May 13, June 17, November 4, 1922; February 23, May 24, June 7, June 14, August 30, October 4, 1924.

39. PAI, February 4, 1922; June 9, 1923.

40. PAI, February 4, July 22, November 4, 1922; June 9, June 28, May 5, 1923; November 20, 1926; August 6, December 24, 1927.

41. Yadvendu, *Yaduvansh ka Aitihas,* p. 140.

42. PAI, January 14, January 28, 1922. These are the first of the weekly Criminal Investigation Department reports in 1922.

43. PAI, February 4, 1922.

44. PAI, May 6, 1922.

45. PAI, June 17, 1922.

46. PAI, June 17, July 22, November 11, 1922; March 24, 1923; August 29, October 10, 1925.

47. PAI, April 22, 1922.

48. Amin, 'Agrarian Bases of Nationalist Agitations in India', pp. 106–7.

49. Premchand, *Karmabhoomi,* pp. 168–71.

50. Amin, 'Agrarian Bases of Nationalist Agitations in India', pp. 106–7.

51. PAI, February 4, March 25, April 1, April 8, April 22, April 29, May 6, May 13, May 20, June 17, July 22, July 29, August 5, 1922.

52. PAI, January 28, April 1, November 4, 1922, January 20, 1923.

53. PAI, November 4, 1922.

54. PAI, May 24, 1924.

55. PAI, November 4, 1922.

56. PAI, December 24, 1927; January 7, 1928.

57. PAI, December 19, 1923; May 3, May 10, 1924; November 7, 1925; March 27, 1926.

58. PAI, August 7, 1926.

59. PAI, May 6, May 20, June 17, 1922; June 9, 1923.

60. Premchand, *Karmabhoomi,* pp. 152–3.

61. PAI, January 28, May 20, 1921, February 4, March 25, April 1, April 22, April 29, May 6, May 13, June 17, July 22, July 29, August 5, November 4, 1922; January 22, 1923.

62. PAI, October 27, 1923.

63. PAI, May 2, 1924.

64. PAI, March 6, 1926; October 13, 1928.

65. Sagar, *Yadav Jivan,* p. 54; Yadvendu, *Yaduvansh ka Aitihas,* p. 126.

66. *Chand* (Hindi monthly, Allahabad), September 1933.

67. D.M. Stewart, 'Cesses in Oudh, 1922', Revenue (A) Progs., May 1925, Uttar Pradesh State Archives (UPSA), pp. 23–147; V. N. Mehta, 'Oudh Kisa Sabha', file no. 753, box no. 6/1920, Revenue Dept., UPSA.

68. 'Rasad and Begari Report Agitation in UP, 1920', file no. 694, box no. 153/1920, GAD, UPSA.

69. Premchand, *Premashram,* pp. 155–65.

70. PAI, March 18, 1922.

71. *Pratap,* April 27, 1928.

72. PAI, February 4, 1922; July 12, August 30, 1924; June 17, July 22, 1922; April 19, 1924; May 16, May 23, June 6, 1925; April 7, 1928.

73. PAI, February 11, February 23, May 3, May 10, May 24, 1924; June 4, November 7, December 5, December 19, 1925; March 27, June 19, October 1, December 24, 1927; January 7, 1928.

74. PAI, April 1, May 13, September 30, November 4, 1922; March 24, April 14, June 9, September 29, 1923; May 15, 1926.

75. PAI, September 30, 1922.

76. PAI, May 20, 1922.

77. PAI, April 1, April 22, May 13, September 30, November 4, 1922; March 24, August 18, 1923; October 18, 1924; October 9, 1926.

78. PAI, June 9, 1923.

79. PAI, October 6, 1923.

80. PAI, June 9, 1923.

81. Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India,* pp. 82, 93.

82. Gopal Baba Walangkar's 1890 petition cited and discussed in Zelliot, 'Dr. Ambedkar and the Mahar Movement', pp. 57–9, 71–2.

83. PAI, November 3, November 10, 1923.

84. Jordens, *Swami Shraddhananda,* pp. 142–3, 154. See also Thursby, *Hindu–Muslim Relations in British India,* p. 167.

85. Pratap, March 3, 1924; *Abhyudaya,* May 17, 1924; PAI, March 1, 1924.

86. Jordens, *Swami Shraddhananda,* pp. 142–51; Thursby, *Hindu-Muslim Relations in British India,* pp. 166–9.

87. Baldev Chaube, 'The Work of *Achhutuddhar* in the United Provinces', *Pratap,* March 25, 1928.

88. *Abhyudaya,* May 17, June 21, 1924.

89. Gooptu, *The Politics of the Urban Poor,* pp. 151, 144. See also Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability,* pp. 67–85.

90. Hardiman, *The Coming of the Devi,* pp. 156–65, especially 163–4.

91. Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere,* pp. 224–39, 267–74, 351–3. In May 1930, *Chand* acknowledged the historical role of the Arya Samaj in *achhutuddhar.*

92. *Pratap,* April 20, 1925. This is the earliest evidence of the term 'Dalit'. Vidyarthi's point about *sanatani* religion was reiterated by *Chand* in March 1927.

93. *Chand,* May 1927.

94. *Chand,* May 1930.

95. *Pratap,* June 1, 1925.

96. *Chand,* February 1930.

97. *Pratap,* March 21, 1926.

98. Gooptu, *The Politics of the Urban Poor,* pp. 155–7; Prashad, *Untouchable Freedom,* pp. 66–75; Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere,* pp. 203–5; Charu Gupta,

'Hindu Women, Muslim Men', pp. 133–4.

99. Prashad, *Untouchable Freedom,* pp. 66–7.

100. Gooptu, *The Politics of the Urban Poor,* pp. 155–6.

101. Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability,* pp. 67–70.

102. Sagar, *Yadav Jivan,* pp. 2–3; Yadvendu, *Yaduvansh ka Aitihas,* p. 6.

103. Yadvendu, *Yaduvansh ka Aitihas,* p. 140.

104. Duncan, 'Levels, the Communication of Programmes, and Sectional Strategies', pp. 265–6.

105. Jatav, *Shri 108 Swami Achhutanand Ji ka Jeevan Parichay,* pp. 11–15; Singh 'Raj', *Swami Achhutanand Harihar,* pp. 13–16.

106. Rai, *The Arya Samaj,* p. 232.

107. *Pratap,* March 25, 1928. See also *Abhyudaya,* February 1, 1930.

108. Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability,* p. 68.

109. Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision,* pp. 38, 67.

110. Ibid., p. 64.

111. Ibid., pp. 37–9; Gooptu, *The Politics of the Urban Poor,* p. 155.

112. Zelliot, 'Dr. Ambedkar and the Mahar Movement', pp. 102–17.

113. *Pratap,* April 10, 1927.

114. *Pratap,* July 27, 1925; February 8, 1926; *Abhyudaya,* June 21, 1924.

115. *Abhyudaya,* February 13, May 8, June 19, 1926.

116. PAI, January 20, April 14, May 5, May 26, June 2, June 9, June 16, June 26, June 30, October 20, October 27, 1923; February 9, March 1, April 5, April 19, May 3, May 10, May 17, August 26, September 9, September 13, 1924; May 23, August 1, August 15, October 17, December 19, 1925; February 13, May 15, May

29, June 26, July 24, October 9, November 16, 1926; April 23, October 1, 1927; July 21, August 18, October 13, 1928. The records indicate the peak of Arya Samaj activities and a decline from 1926 onward.

117. PAI, April 14, May 5, 1923; *Pratap,* March 3, 1924.

118. *Chand,* March 1927.

119. *Pratap,* March 24, August 11, 1924; *Abhyudaya,* August 16, 1924; March 31, 1928.

120. PAI, March 10, November 3, 1923; April 5, October 18, October 25, 1924; April 2, October 8, 1927.

121. PAI, June 7, 1923.

122. PAI, November 3, 1923; February 23, 1924.

123. PAI, February 23, 1924.

124. PAI, October 9, 1926.

125. PAI, April 21, 1928.

126. PAI, March 17, 1923; February 2, 1924; January 10, 1925; September 26, March 27, 1926.

127. Hazari, *I Was an Outcaste.* According to its preface, the book was written in 1935.

128. PAI, April 14, May 5, May 26, November 24, 1923; June 7, 1924.

129. Thursby, *Hindu-Muslim Relations in British India,* p. 154.

130. PAI, March 1, October 10, 1925.

131. *Pratap,* May 18, June 1, 1925; PAI, May 16, May 23, June 6, 1925.

132. Rai, *The Arya Samaj,* p. 231.

133. PAI, March 10, November 3, 1923; April 5, October 18, October 25, 1924; April 2, October 8, 1927.

134. PAI, October 4, 1924; Premchand, *Karmabhoomi,* pp. 193–206.

135. PAI, April 21, 1923; *Pratap,* January 9, 1927.

136. PAI, May 5, 1923.

137. PAI, May 5, October 20, 1923; August 15, 1925.

138. PAI, September 20, 1924; *Pratap,* July 27, 1925; February 8, 1926; *Abhyudaya,* March 3, 1928.

139. PAI, March 10, 1923.

140. PAI, March 31, April 7, 1928.

141. PAI, October 17, December 19, 1925; February 13, June 26, 1926. These include reports from Meerut, Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, Moradabad, and Gorakhpur.

142. PAI, June 16, 1923.

143. PAI, June 4, October 1, 1927; September 13, 1924.

144. PAI, August 1, 1925.

145. PAI, March 31, 1923.

146. *Abhyudaya,* August 2, 1924; February 4, 1926; Premchand, *Karmabhoomi,* pp. 169–72.

147. *Pratap,* April 27, 1925.

148. Jatav, *Shri 108 Swami Achhutanand Ji ka Jeevan Parichay,* p. 14; Singh 'Raj', *Achhutanand Harihar,* p. 41.

149. PAI, April 23, July 10, 1926.

150. Jigyasu, *Bharat ke Adi Nivasiyon ki Sabhyata,* p. 9.

151. Ibid., pp. 11, 10.

152. Ibid., p. 9.

153. Ibid., pp. 45–6, 74–5, 65–9.

154. Ibid., pp. 11–13.

155. Ibid., pp. 26–35.

156. Jatav, *Shri 108 Swami Achhutanand Ji ka Jeevan Parichay,* p. 14. See also Singh 'Raj', *Swami Achhutanand Harihar,* p. 41.

157. Jatav, *Shri 108 Swami Achhutanand Ji ka Jeevan Parichay,* p. 14.

158. PAI, April 23, 1926.

159. *Abhyudaya,* April 24, 1926.

160. PAI, April 23, 1926.

161. *Abhyudaya,* April 24, 1926.

162. *Abhyudaya,* April 14, 1928.

163. *Abhyudaya,* April 24, 1926.

164. PAI, July 10, 1926.

165. *The Leader,* April 14, 1926.

166. *Pratap,* January 8, 1928; *Aaj,* January 1, 1928; *Chand,* February 1928; *Abhyudaya,* April 14, 1928.

167. *Pratap,* October 13, 1928.

168. PAI, April 7, April 28, May 5, June 23, October 13, December 8, 1928; January 19, June 8, June 22, August 31, October 5, October 26, 1929.

169. *Pratap,* November 24, 1924.

170. PAI, May 17, 1924.

171. PAI, April 23, 1927; April 21, 1928.

172. PAI, June 4, 1927.

173. PAI, March 31, April 7, 1928.

174. Lala Lajpat Rai, *'Achhut* bhaiyon! Sarkari Jaal Mein Mat Fason' *(Achhut* brothers! Don't get trapped in the government's web), *Pratap,* April 1, 1928.

175. *Pratap,* January 8, 1928.

176. *Abhyudaya,* April 14, 1928.

177. *Chand,* February 1928.